

**RITUAL AND TRANSCENDENCE IN POPULAR AMERICAN  
APOCALYPTIC FILM**

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R. E. Spencer

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## ABSTRACT

This work will concern the treatment of the apocalypse in popular American film since 1970. The films are referred to by the generic classification “apocalyptic film”, defined as any film which treats a cataclysmic event, originating outside earth (that is, an external threat, such as asteroids, aliens and Antichrists, but excluding nuclear war or accident, epidemic disease, or environmental disaster) affecting the world as a whole, threatening death or damnation of society’s relationship to the individual. This study will examine the nature of the wisdom and philosophy communicated by apocalyptic film, particularly conceptions of society’s relationship to the individual. There is a particular emphasis on Revelation as source material, as its apocalyptic images and general structure provide the framework for the genre. The protagonist is examined in terms of a ritual subject, moving through a liminal process of spiritual discovery in an apocalyptic landscape.

Fear of death and the chaos of human existence are the instigators of countless works of fiction and philosophy; they work to give urgency and credence to founding social myths and beliefs, the fears thereby working as a societal regulator. The apocalyptic film has an important place in our cultural understanding of death, and of ourselves. The apocalypse can be seen as a metaphor for a time of social crisis, and its avoidance represents a celebration of human agency over threatening forces originating both inside and outside society.

## INTRODUCTION

It's as if movies answer an ancient quest for the common unconscious. They fulfil a spiritual need people have: to share a common memory.<sup>1</sup>

The apocalyptic film provides not only the affirming, reiterative structures of genre film, but also presents a scenario that implicates all of humanity. The end of the world appeals not only to a natural fear of individual mortality, but also to a wider sense of loss: that of the illusion of physical human 'immortality' located in procreation. Apocalypse eradicates the notion that humanity is a kind of genetic relay race in which the passing on of one's DNA (as well as one's culture and possessions) equates to an evasion of utter death.

This work will concern the treatment of the apocalypse in popular American film since 1970. The films are referred to by the generic classification "apocalyptic film", defined as any film which treats a cataclysmic event, originating outside earth (that is, an external threat, such as asteroids, aliens and Antichrists, but excluding nuclear war or accident, epidemic disease, or environmental disaster<sup>2</sup>) affecting the world as a whole, threatening death or damnation. The films fit into other generic categories besides this one, such as horror, science fiction, drama, action and fantasy, but all share a commonality of theme, as well as plot elements and source myth/material. There is a particular emphasis on Revelation as source material, as its apocalyptic images and general structure provide the framework for the genre. Fear of death and the chaos of human existence have instigated countless works of fiction and philosophy, giving credence to founding social myths and beliefs, and thereby working as a societal regulator. The apocalyptic film has an important place in our cultural understanding of death; the fatalistic or contextualised death, which defies our actual

perceptions of empirical reality, imposes meaning or significance on the act of dying, or at least implies that some meaning might exist. What is defended in apocalypse film is not merely physical life, but also all human life to come, and the moral and social precepts that serve to give life “meaning”.

Consequently, what comes under examination is the intrinsic nature and value of human life.

Genre film constitutes a repository of contemporary folklore. The hero's journey can be seen as part of a system of motifs and images which make up a modern myth cycle, in which a broad base of human concerns can be treated. Central is a theme of reassurance, of humanity's significance in the (spiritual) universe, which incorporates a sense of immortality, discovered first through the retraction and then the reinstatement of the future. Mythological cycles traditionally express popular ideology and philosophy. Film is a natural successor to the tradition of socially-defining stories and songs; the narratives are proverbial retellings of traditional/societal wisdom. This study will examine the nature of the wisdom and philosophy communicated by apocalyptic film, particularly conceptions of society's relationship to the individual.

To discuss myth, and to suggest that the ritual process has some function in society is to raise the problematic of universals. If postmodernism is defined as an incredulity or scepticism towards metanarratives, and I am identifying apocalyptic film as a retelling of the monomyth, how does the postmodern climate affect the manifestations and representations of apocalyptic film? There are certain conventions that work to create a sense of the mythic. The possibility of physical destruction is centred on specific universes; for example, America often represents the entire world. In *The 5th Element* (Luc Besson, 1995), the universal is literalised, as communities of friendly and unfriendly aliens become involved in the threat to earth. The chief element that makes sense of the universal, however, is the figure of the

protagonist. Where the mythic tradition has a paradigmatic representative such as Oedipus, Maui, or Christ, heroes essentially superior to normal people, the filmic convention of naturalism demands a character with whom psychological identification is possible. This has different implications depending on the state of culture at the time of each film's release. In some cases, the hero begins from a wealthy position, in others the opposite is true; factors such as gender, class, race, physical power, and spiritual status differ depending on what elicits sympathy in the contemporary social climate and the nature of the intended identification.

As Joseph Campbell writes, "the 'Call to Adventure' signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown."<sup>3</sup> The apocalypse ultimately stands for the personal apocalypse of an individual's death. It is significant that projectors and prophets expect to see the Last Judgement (or the final meteor) within their lifetime; it is unthinkable that the ripples of one's own life will fade out and vanish along with countless others, or that the most important and cataclysmic event in world history since the Big Bang should happen indiscriminate of our participation. The apocalypse is an entirely personal event; while being in one sense universal to humanity, each person can die but once, and experience only his/her own suffering and death. The End of the World is thus encapsulated in each person's life and death. In apocalyptic film, that process is examined through the protagonist, and is typically one of spiritual awakening and the opportunity to undergo a baptism of desire: to consciously choose between a life dominated by good or evil, and to take ultimate responsibility for one's earthly life and what may come after. The protagonist occupies the position of a ritual subject, and the films describe a journey through a spiritual rite of passage in which his/her complacency with him/herself and the world is challenged through confrontation with elements of a supernatural, inverted world outside his/her experience or control. This

world is neither fully earth not fully transcendent of earth, but rather the cusp between, the instant of transition, and in it social expectations, conventions and rules are suspended, in “a period or area of social limbo,”<sup>4</sup> as Victor Turner puts it.

Turner calls this process ‘liminal’<sup>5</sup> (from the Latin for ‘threshold’) in his discussion of the symbolic social ritual process of initiation. A liminal space is the location of the subject’s spiritual passage to some new awareness and/or phase of life. It is a transitional space marked by transgression of traditionally accepted concepts of order and reality; it is marginal, on the edges of reality and society, beneath them, the inverse of normal order. Liminality is the state of incompleteness, of becoming rather than being. The apocalypse itself is a liminal space, looking forward to the end and thus altering the quality of the time left, placing not only the protagonist, but all creation outside the usual regulators of life and death. Unlike normal life, where social status may provide a buffer against certain kinds of sin, the limbo of pre-death eradicates complacency; it is the playground of temptation and disorientation. Any choice can be made and the soul is damned or saved on common ground. Human laws and conventions are suspended and boundaries become blurred, including those between the spiritual and empirical spheres. In apocalyptic film this manifests as the earthly presence of angels and demons in *The Omen*, *The Prophecy*, and *End Of Days*, and the fighting of human battles beyond earth, for example on asteroids in *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact*, on distant planets in *The 5th Element* and in the sky in *Independence Day*. Films which describe a liminal process often involve a journey on the edge of life and death, which allows for an interrogation of the nature of both. The space between becomes a place outside, where questions of truth, identity, the future and the nature of existence are posed.

The negotiation of this world, the choices it presents and the initiand’s success or otherwise in coming to a place of reconciliation with its

complexities provide the emotional tension in apocalyptic film. The liminal world is designated as sacred; it marks a separation from the quotidian world into one open only to students, seekers and supplicants. In popular film, the sacredness of the apocalyptic space is marked by the use of Christian imagery and philosophy; this is true of both ostensibly secular and explicitly religious-based scenarios. The figure of the protagonist equates to Christ, a member of the afflicted people who achieves apotheosis through his/her self-sacrifice. Peter Berger states that “religion legitimates social institutions by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is, by *locating* them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference.”<sup>6</sup> The Christian context of many apocalyptic films gives credibility to the social values prescribed by the films, legitimating them via reference to a deified moral structure. The social affiliation demonstrated by the sacrifice is a purging of negative or disruptive social elements and is a reaffirmation of society that recalls the New Jerusalem, a utopic state of new, eternal life for the faithful. Therefore, the use of Christian motifs and doctrine in popular film serves to legitimate the depicted social values, basing their moral rightness in the Christian tradition, while demonstrating the unpleasant fate of deviants. This usage also works to naturalise Christianity as the western conception of spirituality, which, combined with the predominance of white heterosexual males as protagonists, constructs a homogenised image of American reality, both physically and ideologically.

Turner’s discussion of the liminal is part of his identification of sacred ritual patterns that occur in many different religions and cultures. The structures described by Turner and by Arnold van Gennep<sup>7</sup> can be discerned in the Christian tradition, which is western culture’s dominant spiritual vocabulary. For example, Christ’s crucifixion begins with his separation from society in his trial and death on the cross; Jesus then undergoes a liminal process of final confrontation with evil after death, descending into hell, and



rising after three days to take his place as God, thereupon entering a new, enhanced and eternal phase of life. Theorists such as Turner, van Gennep and Bakhtin show the significance of the separate ritual stages, their purpose in the communication of the folkloric wisdoms, and how the playing out of these ritual dramas in popular films is a life-giving regeneration of societal affiliation, a symbolic verification and reunification of society. The fact that apocalyptic film, and genre film in general, is structured similarly to traditional ritual forms suggests a perpetuity of relevance for these story cycles, their ability to engage, to satisfy in their audience a desire for completeness and comprehensibility, as well as to affirm the social order, creating a sense of sacred destiny to its existence and forms.

The highly symbolic language typical of the apocalyptic has been exploited as an image bank by popular-secular and popular-religious culture. In the face of random war and disaster, real and potential, the course and culmination of human existence is rendered explicable, pre-ordained in the teleological model of the apocalypse. St John's Revelation (accurate in the singular, as John witnesses one complete vision) is the last book of the New Testament. Written in the last years of the first century AD it is but one of many contemporaneous apocalyptic writings. The word 'apocalypse' is from the Greek *Apokalyptein*, to reveal or unveil a mystery. St John's apocalypse is generally regarded by theologians today not as a description of a future literal occurrence, but rather as an encouragement to persecuted early Christians, an assurance that their faith and suffering would be vindicated in the new order. The symbols and codes within the text refer to events and persons relevant to early Christians, and are cryptic in order to prevent discovery and comprehension by oppressors.

In order to maintain clarity I will adopt the popular usage of the word 'apocalypse' to denote an end-of-the-world scenario, whether of secular or religious origin. To further clarify the terms used in this study, the word

‘millennium’ appears exclusively to describe the temporal transition between the 20th and 21st centuries; ‘Armageddon’ is used in its proper sense (except when referring to the film title *Armageddon*, which is indicated by italics), as the site of the final deciding battle between Christ and Satan in Revelation 16; and ‘Revelation’ to signify St John’s vision as it is recorded in the New Testament.

This study is divided into two sections. The first concerns the secular apocalypse in popular American film, examining the secularisation of the Christian framework, and how the resonance with Christianity lends an epic quality to the films. The second section concerns the explicit use of Christian eschatology in apocalyptic films, how it manifests and its political and social implications. In Section One, the first chapter examines the nature of the spiritual quest in the ostensibly secular apocalyptic films *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact*. Both films concern the imminent collision of a large meteor with earth, and the human effort to prevent it. The source of the apocalypse is nature, a random event within the realm of possibility, but not incurred by any fault of humanity. This chapter will, however, outline the negative social conditions that symbolically, at least, precipitate the apocalyptic threat, and the moral fable that results from the triumphant ideologies in the films. The chapter also describes the ritual passage undergone by the protagonist in his rise to the status of messiah, in effect a social alignment that by association deifies the society and its moral structures. The second chapter, concerning *Independence Day* and *The Arrival*, has a similarly secular agent of apocalypse, the alien invader. The difference between this source of danger and the meteor films is the aliens’ desire to eradicate humans; there are reasons for the apocalyptic threat, and an intelligent contest for the right to dominate earth. In one sense, this provides the opportunity for the aliens to be coded as evil, representing the figure of Antichrist, or a biblical plague; in

another, they comment on the careless negligence of humanity, merely hastening an eco-apocalypse already on its way. The external invader is also a metaphor for human territoriality; the aliens constitute a repository for Otherness, whether in terms of race, sex or belief.

In Section Two, the third chapter focuses on the explicitly Christian apocalyptic film, represented by *The Omen* and *The Prophecy*. These films describe the consequences of a faltering Christian Church on earth, with social and spiritual decline as an apocalyptic threat. The threat comes partly from without, in the form of the Antichrist or a dark angel, but in fact represents the death of the soul, a culture whose spiritual foundation is crumbling, affecting not only the institution of the church but all the conventions and laws based upon and supported by the shared religious heritage. Chapter Four concerns the problematic treatment of female protagonists in two Christian-based apocalyptic films, *The Seventh Sign* and *The Rapture*. In a sense, the apocalyptic threat confronted by female protagonists equates to staving off the despair produced by their oppressed position in patriarchal society. Not quite Christ, the female protagonist struggles to reconcile her role in both society and in apocalyptic ritual. Chapter 5, by contrast, highlights the male role in the recent apocalyptic films *The 5th Element* and *End Of Days*, describing the apocalyptic crisis as a metaphor of the uncertain male role in post-feminist society. The films constitute a dream of heroic destiny for the white working class male, a compensation for the disorientation caused by a levelling of gender equality.

The study of popular apocalypticism is important for its tendency to catalogue the fears and solaces of the wider culture. The films operate as a reflection and placebo for societal problems, and provide a popular forum for philosophical discourse on the human condition. The confrontation of death, especially the universal death of apocalypse, serves to make life more urgent, demanding proof of humanity's significance in the universe. As Frank

Kermode states: “our interest in endings - endings of fictional plots, of epochs - may derive from a common desire to defeat chronicity, the intolerable idea that we live within an order of events between which there is no relation, pattern, mutuality or intelligible progression.”<sup>8</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Scorsese, M. in Marsh, C. and Ortiz, G. (eds.) *Explorations in Theology and Film*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 1997 p.1
- <sup>2</sup> The subject of eco-apocalypse is raised by both *Independence Day* and *The Arrival*, treated in Chapter Two. In these films it represents a human parallel to the external threat, but is not the immediate apocalyptic circumstance it is in, for example, *Waterworld* (Kevin Reynolds, 1995).
- <sup>3</sup> Campbell, J. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* New York: Pantheon Books Inc. 1949 p.58
- <sup>4</sup> Turner, V. *From Ritual to Theatre*, New York: PAJ Publications Ltd 1992 p.24
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Berger, P. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, New York: Doubleday, 1967, p.33 quoted in Torrance, R. *The Spiritual Quest: Transcendence in Myth, Religion and Science*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994 p.4
- <sup>7</sup> Van Gennep, A. *Rites Of Passage*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960
- <sup>8</sup> Kermode, F. in Bull, M. (ed.) *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 1995

## SECTION ONE: The Popular Secular Apocalyptic Film

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### CHAPTER I

#### **The Messianic Self-Sacrifice in the Secular Apocalyptic: *Armageddon and Deep Impact.***

The structure and thematics of the apocalyptic films *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998) and *Deep Impact* (Mimi Leder, 1998) reveal a teleological vision of human existence, coupled with a demonstration of the ritualised affiliation process of a subject with his or her society. The films depict a mythic struggle, precipitated by a global threat, for salvation and renewal. They evoke a mystical, folkloric sense of human destiny, based in a presumption of what Frank Kermode calls a “sovereign humanity.” That is, “instead of providing hope for an eschatological kingdom,... [they] attempt to provide hope for this world.”<sup>1</sup> The films locate heroism and spirituality in a context of human communality, forging from a secular apocalyptic threat a fable of idealised moral courage and societal affirmation.

*Armageddon* and *Deep Impact* are similar films in terms of plot: the narratives centre on the threat of an asteroid’s collision with earth; the same solution, the sending of drillers to the asteroid to bury a nuclear warhead in its core, is proposed and carried out. In order to achieve this, a sacrifice of life is offered in return for the billions saved on earth. Both can be deconstructed by focusing on their mythical aspect, examining how meaning is created through the depiction of a central character undergoing a rite of passage. It is possible,

however, in showing where the two converge, to highlight the important differences between them.

The trajectory of the narratives describe a quest, a heroic journey towards a sacred goal, that of salvation. Structurally the concept of a myth suggests a narrative framework that makes semiological meaning of its parts: beginning, middle, and end in logical, fatalistic progression towards the communication of a cultural truth. This parallels the teleological model presented by apocalyptic film, which subjects time and human experience to the organising logic of parable. Images drawn from Revelation support the mythical context: for example, in the planetarium-like display of the opening scenes, the comet that killed the dinosaurs is described as creating “a blanket of dust the sun was powerless to penetrate for a thousand years”. The period mentioned is a recurring motif in Revelation, denoting a magically exorbitant length of time, connected to power that transcends the brief lifespan of humans. Here it has the same effect, magnifying the threat beyond human resiliency. The comet itself, while being an ostensibly secular agent of doom, has its parallel in Revelation 8: the fallen star Wormwood, “burning like a ball of fire”.

The hero's quest can be read in terms of a rite of passage, its progression divided into three separate parts. Arnold Van Gennep identifies the stages in the hero's ritual process as he/she moves from one phase of life into another: *separation*, the subject's movement away from the everyday secular world into a symbolic, sacred space of ritual; *transition*, which describes the interstitial area of the subject's journey and trial, in an inverted, antistructural space; and *incorporation*, the subject's reincorporation into the society, marking the beginning of a new phase of life.<sup>2</sup>

The subject generally occupies a position of distance from society, the result of some social disfunction. The apocalypse becomes metaphorical for this negative social condition, the crisis point; In *Armageddon* and *Deep*

*Impact* the apocalypse represents the breakdown of the family as a social unit and the resulting confusion of roles. The problem is concentrated in a protagonist, whose experience of the problem has led to conflict with society. In a sense, the disillusioned or cynical protagonist represents a threat to society, his/her existence being an implicit reproach against its shortcomings; the apocalypse is a literal threat that parallels and symbolically originates from the ideological conflict. It is up to the hero to find for him/herself the reasons to salvage society from destruction and, in doing so, reaffirm its hegemony over both him/herself and the wider populace. In *Armageddon* the process of the protagonist, Harry S. Stamper (Bruce Willis), follows these processual divisions. A paradigmatic apocalyptic hero, Harry begins the film at odds with his society, physically distant on his oil rig in the ocean, and emotionally distant as evidenced in his failed marriage and alienated daughter Grace (Liv Tyler). Grace, despite her childhood raised by “roughnecks” on the rig, is the embodiment of the civilisation from which Harry is estranged. Grace refuses to call her father “Dad,” rejecting the parental relationship, and states that Harry ceased to have control of her when she “reached the age of ten and became older than you, Harry, since mom split, why don’t you take your pick.” True to her name, she is the epitome of control and domestication; she is linked to officialdom in her professional dealings with Japanese visitors to the rig, and her sexual relationship with Harry’s protégé AJ (Ben Affleck), is legitimated by love. The progress of Harry’s journey toward reconciliation with his society is measured throughout the film by the state of his relationship with Grace. As Harry manifests increasingly adult behaviour, she gradually reverts from disapproving mother to her preferred role as obedient daughter. At the outset, however, it is apparent that in this all-male environment, any woman, even a child-woman of ten such as Grace was when she superseded Harry’s control, is more mature than the uncivilised males, who live like lost boys in a Neverland of rampant physicality and phallic power.

Unlike *Armageddon*, which is centred in the journey of a single protagonist, *Deep Impact*'s narrative is more disparate, with different aspects of the ritual journey embodied by three separate subjects. Each subject occupies a distinct subplot within the film, all of which are interlinked by the dominant plot of the apocalyptic threat. The plot first to appear is the narrative involving Leo Biederman (Elijah Wood), the teenage hobby astronomer who discovers the asteroid; the second concerns Jenny Lerner (Téa Leoni), a young reporter for MSNBC, who breaks the story of the global threat; and the third is the messianic figure of Spurgeon Tanner (Robert Duvall), the astronaut who finally averts the "extinction level event".

Jenny Lerner is the embodiment of the process of separation. Her narrative is an exposure of the negative social conditions that precede the apocalypse, including the breakdown of family and government corruption. She is first introduced in a context of familial dysfunction, investigating Secretary of the Treasury Rittenhouse's recent resignation. The MSNBC news team discuss their scepticism over the official reason, that Rittenhouse's wife is ill; Jenny reveals that the wife's sickness is alcoholism, and that she has been hospitalised due to this failing, exacerbated by "a series of affairs; [she] stepped it up last year after their son died of leukaemia". The wife and child are thus poisoned by the actions of a wayward husband. Jenny herself perverts the sanctity of the familial when she reveals to Beth, her single-parent co-worker, that she got her information through dating a White House aide with a "wife, three kids", who has "been after me for years". Jenny uses her sexuality to exploit and aggravate a weakened family structure and thereby receive privileged information about the failings of others. Despite the knowledge that Rittenhouse's wife is genuinely unwell, she immediately assumes that the real reason for his resignation is an attempt to cover up another scandalous affair. Rittenhouse's secretary, interviewed by Jenny, has the same opinion. Angry that what she assumes is his infidelity has left her



betrayed and unemployed, she commits a similar infidelity in talking to Jenny. She acknowledges the sinful, antisocial nature of this infidelity and also vilifies Jenny's parasitic role when she says "I'm selling my soul right now; I can feel it". Jenny's professional environment is one in which loyalty and family structures are decayed and corrupt. The critical parable that is Jenny's narrative is characterised by a motif of pearls: she herself wears a pearl necklace in every scene; Jason and Chloe give her pearl drop earrings as a peace offering, a bribe for complicity; and Robin wears a pendant of a single pearl in a black setting. Pearls in one sense represent purity, which may be an ironic reference to the problems in the family, but they also are a symbol for tears. Read in this context, Jenny is owned by tears in her extravagant but imprisoning collar: the gift of earrings is one of additional teardrops, and her mother wears one next to her darkened heart. Pearls, due to their nature as an irritant to the oyster that hosts them, can be seen here also to indicate a facade of calm and beauty covering a painful, corrupt interior, layers of simulated happiness over a contaminated core. The pearl becomes a symbol of the dying, miasmatic world that Jenny occupies and embodies, which endangers the society that hosts it and which, as an aggregate of the negative aspects of that society, must be purged. Unable to reconcile her familial issues over the course of the film, Jenny is part of the social decay destroyed by the apocalypse.

There is an inference that a society which can only believe the worst of its members and which regards infidelity and corruption as not only the norm, but something that can be used for the advancement of others, is itself sick, decadent and as such deserving of the destruction that it brings upon itself. The familial dysfunction of individuals in *Deep Impact* is an indicator of the social dissolution that engenders and perpetuates it. David Bromley, In *Millennium, Messiahs and Mayhem*, describes the tendency of apocalyptic scenarios to denounce a set of perceived societal deviancies, seeing them as a

cause and target for the destruction to follow: “Apocalyptic revelations are particularly likely to enunciate unitary, overarching principles a response to the compromise and corruption within the social order that has precipitated the current crisis.”<sup>3</sup> In *Deep Impact*, the “unitary, overarching principles” are ethnocentric culture and parochial, conservative definitions of home. America is the centre of both fear and hope, and there is a strong sense that its preservation equates to world survival. In *Armageddon*, the depiction of the epic importance of the shuttle mission is achieved both with the destruction of Shanghai and Paris by meteoric debris, and with scenes of people around the world listening to the president’s radio address while pictured against quaint, culturally stereotyped backdrops, implying their reliance on America’s redemptive intervention. In keeping with the American domination of this diegetic universe, there are an equal number of shots showing Americans reacting to the crisis, and all the domestic and international scenes are organised into the unifying motif of red, white and blue: the framing of sky, buildings, clothing and faces is contrived to impose the American flag over the bodies, cultures and religions of a dependent world.

In *Deep Impact*, by contrast, the various protagonists represent a supposed cross section communality, although it is a predominantly white, middle class, American vision of heterogeneity. There are never any shots that show the world outside the US except on the smaller TV screens of the MSNBC newsroom, which are merely a catalogue of the growing chaos in the face of the apocalypse. This excision of the rest of the world from the apocalyptic scenario makes sense in terms of the film’s location of virtue and salvation. Where *Armageddon* offers a vision of romantic love as the centre and summit of human experience, *Deep Impact* extends the concept a defining step further: what is to be saved is Home, and home is to be found not only in the family, but also within one’s culture. President Beck (Morgan Freeman) proclaims as “our way of life,” a concept of a virtuous, essential collectivity,

which must be preserved whether or not the earth itself is saved from the asteroid; the government has developed ways to secure the perpetuation of American culture regardless of the success of the shuttle mission.

The first of these tactics is to exert military control over those who demonstrate deviance: even in the face of destruction there is to be no deviation from the social structure: “Our society will continue as normal: work will go on, you will pay your bills”, commands President Beck. In order to ensure the survival of this cult of home, the government has spent two years constructing underground caves in which to house animals, plants, art, and one million people. These are to include eight hundred thousand randomly selected Americans under the age of fifty, to supplement the two hundred thousand pre-selected “scientists, doctors, engineers, teachers, soldiers and artists.”<sup>4</sup> This description of the selection demonstrates that American officials are willing to make choices about what constitutes desirable, contributing members of a culture, and the line is drawn in terms of profession and ability to procreate. Presumably the selection also includes Beck, along with celebrities like Jenny and Leo, exposing clear bias in the supposedly democratic, random “lottery” of salvation.

Beck also makes it clear that there is no unified international effort to protect life; he explains that other countries have been “preparing similar caves along whatever lines they feel are best to preserve their way of life”. Considering the paternal, dominant aspect of the mostly American shuttle mission (despite an announcement that it is a combined Russian-American effort, only one of the six astronauts is Russian), Beck’s lack of interest in the safety of other countries seems a shirking of the responsibility he and his country so forcefully had assumed. Beck does not announce the impending crisis to anyone outside America until just before the press conference, by which time the US has already been in preparation for a year. It is immediately apparent that countries with less economic power than America

will not be able to preserve very much of their “way of life”, or have such a pseudo-democratic method of selection. This effectively ensures that what survives is not only the American people, but also an American dominated version of history. It is made explicit that art museums are storing US cultural artefacts in the caves, but no American acts of preservation are undertaken to save for example, the contents of the Louvre, the Sistine Chapel ceiling, or the British museum, let alone the aesthetic achievements of non-western peoples, all of which become the responsibility of their host countries. Instead, America preserves eighteenth century desks and sets of silver, which Jenny’s mother donates to the Ark’s collection when she learns she herself will not be saved.

Connected to this sustaining of a cultural, territorial sense of home is a recurring motif of individual homes as indicators of the spiritual state of their owners. “Home” as a location is a metaphor for the self of its owners; in *Armageddon* Harry’s crew occupy the exposed, tubular, streaming viscera of the oil rig, in direct contrast to the smooth official surfaces of the NASA boardrooms of their counterparts. They are wild, physical, and shown to be indulgent of their bodily desires: Max is obese, Rockhound is lecherous. Like Harry they are isolated from their society despite their apparent worth: Rockhound is a “genius” who taught at University until his penchant for underage girls necessitated a less civilised calling; Oscar is described as a “brilliant geologist”, but his physical nature keeps him out of the official sphere for the freedom the margins offer; and Chick, Harry’s right hand man and conscience, who was once in Air Force command, is a gambler who has abandoned his family. Paradoxically, it is this male virility in excess that becomes the agent of salvation. Dangerous and kept safely isolated during normal life, it is the power of the phallus that saves the world. This is shown when the government agents who send for Harry discuss him in voice-over: he is the world’s best driller, “whatever they said couldn’t be drilled, this guy drilled it.” This description of Harry’s mythic virility is interposed with shots

of the rig's jutting scaffolds and gushing oil; this image is contrasted shortly afterward in the establishing shot of NASA's headquarters (the government's represented 'home,' at least in terms of the apocalyptic crisis), showing a monument which in its attempt at triumph, is tragic: a space shuttle, lying prone, cut into sections and spread across the grass, an emblem of the official sphere's castrated, impotent weakness. .

In *Deep Impact*, Jenny Lerner has no home of her own. Jenny personifies the consequences of non-conformity to the dominant ideals of home and family. She is a career woman with no partner or children, for whom fulfilment comes through seeking out and exposing the shortcomings of these ideals. Although her journalistic revelations of corruption are intended to denounce such decadence, they effectively demonstrate the failure of morality as a social control and establishes corruption as prevalent even and especially in the government. Jenny's position is thus undermining of the credibility of the official world while being in no way suggestive of an alternative: she represents degradation without its ludic, life-giving aspect of renewal.

In apocalyptic film, the protagonist is singled out for trial because of his/her distance from society, and through a further, enforced distance, involving uncertain status and the confrontation of an inverted world that the subject learns to appreciate and affiliate with society. This process is regenerative, a profession of faith that renews society's dominance. In *Armageddon*, the beginning of the transitional stage of Harry's rite of passage is marked by his meeting Dan Truman (Billy Bob Thornton) at NASA. This meeting is Harry's call to responsibility, to the emotional maturity he has avoided, the lack of which prevents his integration into society. Harry and Truman are linked in several ways, possibly indicating that they are counterparts: Truman is what Harry would be if he grew up, and Harry embodies the virility and physicality that are the price paid by such as Truman to enter society's ranks. Both are the pragmatic leaders of their respective

environments; their combined names, 'Harry', his middle initial 'S', and 'Truman' evoke President Harry S. Truman, possibly in reference to his role in authorising the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan in World War Two, which would connect to the somewhat edgy treatment of nuclear missiles in the film; for example, in the shuttle preparation sequence a description of the meteor as a "global killer" by a journalist is juxtaposed with a shot of a warhead. It also significantly connects to the famous sign on his desk, "The Buck Stops Here", indicating ultimate accountability for the actions of his administration. There is no one Harry can pass the buck to, in terms of the burden of responsibility he is asked to carry: he is identified as the only one capable of meeting the challenge. In order to save both society and himself, he must align himself with this maxim and assume the adult duties he has so long avoided.

Truman is a noble, empathetic leader, but he is physically flawed. He wears a metal leg brace that explains his inability to manifest the same virile physicality as Harry and his team. This handicap evokes the myth of the Fisher King, a figure in Arthurian Grail legends; in these tales, the worker-king of a region is wounded in battle, pierced through what is euphemistically referred to as the thigh. This injury affects the physical potency of the king, and by association and spiritual connection the fertility of his land suffers and becomes barren. The quest for the Grail is undergone with the object of curing the king, restoring the possibility of regeneration to his land and people. The links between this myth and the apocalyptic scenario as a whole are strong; the apocalypse threatens not only the people present for it, but also removes the solace of genetic immortality, the concept that although individuals die, the population as a whole is forever renewing itself through procreation.

Truman's delegation of responsibility to Harry marks the entry to the transitional stage of his rite of passage. In this stage, the ritual subject must

“pass through a period or area of social ambiguity, a sort of social limbo,”<sup>5</sup> that is to say, he comes into contact with an inverted world, an antistructure, in which all societal conventions, expectations and rules are suspended. In *From Ritual To Theatre*, Victor Turner terms this area ‘liminal’,<sup>6</sup> meaning a threshold between spaces and states of being. As a general principle, the antistructural world entered into by the initiand can be linked to the dionysian or carnivalesque, and so it is appropriate that the physical, playful rig crew should invade NASA’s regimented authority so completely. The crew, which includes such traditional carnival figures as fat man Max, the giant Bear, and Rockhound, the lascivious clown, manifests a symbolic system which signifies difference, celebration and strangeness, and which provides a vocabulary of images which resonate in the popular psyche. The traditional carnival vocabulary focuses on the body, especially the transgressive body. Bakhtin discusses the body as a site of communality: the body that crosses its boundaries, the open, “ever unfinished, ever creating body.”<sup>7</sup> The body is an agent of the carnivalesque inversion of authority, and it is central to what Bakhtin terms ‘degradation’. He defines: “degradation” as “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract...[It] digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one.”<sup>8</sup>

The degradation of authority is enacted by the reduction of the symbols of officialdom to bodily metaphors. In *Armageddon*, what is brought low is the closed and clinical technologies that represent NASA’s economic and cultural power. Just as the oil rig represented its inhabitants’ virile energy, so the sweaty boardrooms and nugatory, infantile models such as the toy shuttles on sticks in Truman’s demonstration of the flight path, which Rockhound compares to a roadrunner cartoon, and the rejected ‘solar shield’ miniature that uncontrollably inflates on the boardroom table, reflect NASA’s impotence. Along with Harry’s debasement of the government’s intellectual

power, he also supersedes NASA's repository of masculine power, the phallically named Willie Sharp. This occurs late in the film in an argument over the control of yet another phallus: the nuclear warhead. Holding a huge pair of boltcutters around Sharp's neck, Harry convinces him that emotional castration is better than the alternative. Sharp yields his power by relinquishing the responsibility for saving his two daughters to Harry, thereby becoming feminised in his association with family and in his dependence on the increasingly adult and parental Harry.

One of the first indications of this degradation is the psychiatric and medical tests carried out on the roughnecks: as the reporting psychiatrist states, they "impressively fail". Bear is told his cholesterol is dangerously high, and he responds with a striptease on the examining table, displaying leopard print briefs and his vital, powerful body that wordlessly negates the official diagnosis, undermining its authority. The soundproofed psychiatric test room closely resembles the simulated moon surface on which the roughnecks train, creating a sense that the room is similarly alien and treacherous; there is a suggestion that passing the test requires its own training in tricks of negotiation in order to maintain the semblance of a predetermined concept of mental health. The roughnecks respond to their official assessment with scepticism, and show no respect for the institution; thus when they are failed, the judgement has no meaning, and becomes instead a critique of homogenising, pro-conformity officialdom.

Previously an outsider, Harry becomes king, a festive Roi du Rire of this inverted world, challenging both the intellectual and physical aspects of the old authority and finding them wanting. Bakhtin identifies this time of release from the dominance of accepted, official authority as characteristic of carnival: "Old authority and truth pretend to be absolute...They do not see their own origin, limitations, end; they do not see the ridiculousness of their pretence at eternity."<sup>9</sup> In *Armageddon* the apocalyptic threat exposes the



government's high-tech, imposing institutions as a facade for disorganisation and posturing. Dr. Quincy, the British astrophysicist who is described by Truman as "pretty much the smartest man in the world" must concede this title to Harry, for not only has Quincy stolen Harry's drill design rather than create his own, he has failed to build it correctly and must ask Harry for advice. Harry's immediate, mocking prognosis of the problem is followed by his incredulity at the ineffectuality of NASA: "and this is the best that the government, the *US* government can do? You're NASA for crying out loud... you're geniuses; you're the guys at thinking shit up!" Harry also compares his "third-generation driller" status, which confers on him the craftsmanship and honour of the honest working man in contrast to the appropriation and slap-dash arrogance of NASA. There is a suggestion that high-level corruption, along with the exploitation of the common man and his taxes has, at least in a symbolic sense, brought about the social crisis of apocalypse, as decadence precipitates the fall of empires. As Harry states, "If you don't trust the men you're working with, you're as good as dead." Kermode however, points out, "decadence is rarely found in isolation from hopes of renovation,"<sup>10</sup> indicating that the decline itself is a sign that renewal is imminent, and that central to the process of apocalyptic threat and reprieve is a life-giving element.

Harry's playfully dominant status in the liminal world carries with it a burden of seriousness. As Robert Torrance states in his discussion of ritual:

Rituals of rebellion and rites of passage accommodate dimensions of social conflict and mobility...but their effect is not to challenge traditional society in the name of alternative values but to reinforce its essential rightness...Such departures from the norm, by being safely contained in a circumscribed liminal arena, in the end reinforce normalcy.<sup>11</sup>

This is particularly significant in apocalyptic film. The circumstance of the apocalypse provides both a universalised context in the sense that the threat is absolute, and an ideological or philosophical discourse centred around the aspects of humanity that can be considered worth saving. Whatever the outcome, the consequences are implicitly applicable to all humanity, however humanity is represented in the film. Thus the motives for saving the world are of primary thematic importance in apocalyptic film, and typically affirm some fundamental aspect of society. In *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact*, the family unit is demonstrated to be fundamental to a stable and effective social structure, to the point that, without them, social roles would become perverted, and in the ensuing chaos the world would perish.

In *Deep Impact*, the young Leo Biederman is a case in point, making a successful journey from childhood to the dominant male of the patriarchal order. His process is a classic rite of passage, an initiation into adulthood. In this sense his journey reflects that of *Armageddon*'s Harry, who similarly progresses from a state of immaturity into the adult responsibility required by his society. Leo, however, is no overgrown misfit, enacting boyhood fantasies on the larger equivalent of an adventure playground; his passage coincides with his passing into adolescence and is enacted in an emotional and spiritual voyage, parallel to the physical journey he will be called to make that will qualify him for his new adult place in society. Leo is first established as being firmly ensconced in the family structure: when the president names him in connection with the comet during the press conference, Leo is at home in his parents' suburban house, which soon becomes filled with the support of the other neighbourhood families celebrating the choice of Leo as their representative. The quiet street outside the Biederman's home is stocked with identical houses, wide front lawns and trees for the many children of many white, heterosexual nuclear families to play in.

Leo's world soon assumes aspects of the joyful, carnivalesque liminal. His social status is inverted, as he attains instant fame and the cover of *Newsweek*, and gives a mock press conference for a school assembly that is a playful satire on the official press conference of two scenes before, with Leo standing in for the president. The serious questions of the previous event are replaced with familiar, comedic comments on Leo's fame, as a classmate stands up to announce, to rapturous applause, that Leo will doubtlessly now be on the receiving end of "more sex than anyone else in our class". His next comment - "that's the main reason its good to be famous!" - belies the depicted stress and burden of the president, who is more famous than anyone and yet can take no joy from his status; it also points to the learned expectation of immorality from celebrities that is cultivated unintentionally by Jenny's exposures. The young people of Leo's school are not yet in the adult sphere of responsibility, and so their response to the threat of destruction is excitement, revelling in the unusual atmosphere while trusting the adults to fulfil their obligation to protect them.

While Leo begins his separation and journey into the liminal in celebration, he has a prolonged trial to undergo on the way to his goal, which is the development from his childhood state into adulthood. In keeping with the motif of the family that operates throughout the film, the transition for Leo is between two families: his birth family, in which he is a child, and his own family, in which he is the husband. In order to save his girlfriend-next-door Sarah, Leo offers her marriage, which will incorporate Sarah into the pre-selected for salvation Biederman family. Sarah is a virtuous daughter, and will not agree unless her own family, the Hotchners are to be saved also, a condition which Leo, who understands the importance of family, has anticipated and organised. The wedding then takes place, a ceremony which marks the passage between Leo's child and adult status, as is explicitly referenced by the officiating priest: "When was a child, I spoke like a child, I

thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man I gave up childish ways.” Leo’s wedding is juxtaposed with other, less hopeful scenes, which provide a comment on the nature of the adulthood Leo is moving into: the president, alone with the burden of his parental responsibility; Jenny as news anchor, keeping a running commentary of the rapidly eroding social structure; and Jenny’s mother Robin, despairing and dying in her empty apartment, the wreckage of her marriage adding poignancy to the hope and innocence of Leo and Sarah’s new beginning.

The elder Biedermans have no such internal strife in their marriage and so pass none on to that of their child. The crisis for Sarah and Leo comes when the Biedermans are collected for the Ark and it becomes apparent that the Hotchners have been excluded despite Leo’s efforts to save them. Sarah, still a virgin child bride and more committed to her parents than her husband, is forced to choose between the two, and thus remains with her parents, unwilling to leave them to die without her: “I have to stay with you, daddy”. There is a patriarchal aspect to the transactions between Sarah’s two families. At this point, the transference in male ownership of Sarah has not yet been completed by consummation, and while Sarah’s father recognises Leo’s right to take her (“Sarah, you need to go”), he does not force her, nor does she feel compelled to go. This is partly because Leo too has not yet fully assumed the mantle of responsibility afforded him by his newly married, adult status, and so chooses to go with his parents, abandoning his new wife. This separation echoes the leaving of his status as child, and begins the physical journey that will demonstrate the spiritual and social progress he makes. Torrance states that:

far from merely dissolving the structural bonds among its members, leaving them isolated in their perilous crossing, the liminal phases essential to the rhythm of social life reconstitute those bonds by creating a deeper awareness of community as a shared human need than any static system of kinship can provide.<sup>12</sup>

This appreciation of the familially oriented social structure is the goal and measure of Leo's journey into adulthood. When Leo arrives at the Ark site, he immediately realises his mistake in leaving his new loyalties behind, and begins his trek back across country to find Sarah. Leo's mother clings to him, attempting to make him respond to her maternal authority, saying "Leo, you come with us right now"; but he has his own impetus and is no longer biddable. His father, recognising this decision as the preface to Leo's independent, incorporated adult life, makes him a gift of whatever valuables he has on his person, "giving him something to trade" as a dowry and a blessing.

Leo heads back to his home town, hoping to find Sarah still there, a childish wish to preserve his innocent history. His old neighbourhood, however, is irreparably changed by his process through the liminal and his impending mature status: Leo's newly adult eyes see his former home made ancient memory, and sees the dust and decay he was oblivious to in childhood security. The street where he has lived as a child is deserted and dirty, sepia toned like an old photograph; it is littered with weeds and paper blowing in the wind, the generic image of a ghost town. Leo takes a motorbike belonging to Sarah's father, which was introduced earlier as a symbol of mid-life crisis: "I don't know who I thought I was going to be when I bought it"; While for Chuck Hotchner it represents the loss of youth, for Leo it is an image of newly acquired adult purpose, a tool in aiding his fulfilment of responsibility. Barely old enough to drive, Leo is in the last stages of his journey into manhood; the scenes of him riding through the traffic jam towards his wife are juxtaposed with shots of Jenny Lerner travelling the other way, towards her father and death. Both are in transit to the culmination of their life processes: Leo to his success, Jenny to her failure. Leo finds Sarah among the desperate chaos of the unselected, and this time she does not argue, justifying the desertion of her parents with the hysterical cry "I'll see you soon". The Hotchners, under no such illusions as to their chances of survival, put Sarah on the motorbike,

giving her their own baby, choosing genetic immortality over possessiveness. Although Sarah's father ruefully exclaims "Biederman" as the comet named for Leo's discovery shoots past, indicating a wry acknowledgement that Leo has succeeded him as head of his own family, when the comet strikes the Hotchners stand calmly together amid the panic of the other travellers, finding peace in the unity they share and in their rescued children. Leo and Sarah escape to a hilltop, and watch the tidal wave recede from the hills below; the star-shower of comet debris erupts like fireworks above their heads, in celebration of Leo's ascension to adulthood and his reward of ready-made family, comprising virginal bride and immaculately acquired baby.

Harry's process is paradigmatic of an apocalyptic hero: distanced from his society, in order to selflessly martyr himself to save it he must first decide what it is about that society that is worth the sacrifice. Harry recognises that other people have found their reasons for affiliation to his culture: he demands a night off for his crew before the launch, in order for them to remember "what they're fighting for". When asking for this time, he identifies family as a central positive aspect of society when, backed by a huge American flag that seems to appear out of nowhere to give cultural credence to his request, he appeals to Sharp's desire to see his daughters. This has a bitter poignancy for Harry; Grace chooses to spend the evening with AJ, leaving Harry presumably alone. Pictured against a sunset, Grace says to AJ: "Do you think it's possible that anyone else in the world is doing this very same thing at this very same moment?" to which AJ replies: "I hope so, otherwise what the hell are we trying to save?" indicating that romantic love, especially in a Hollywood setting, is the epitome of human hope and experience. Chick also chooses to spend his time with his family; he visits his ex-partner and child, to apologise for the wrongs he has done them in the past, and to make them aware of the sacrifice he is making for their sake. Thus AJ and Chick demonstrate value systems that are legitimated by the dominant ideology: heterosexual unions,

sanctified by love and marriage. For this, they will be rewarded with life, with their chosen partners waiting for them when they arrive back on earth; Sharp, too, is allowed to live after he chooses his family over his governmental orders, and Lev Andropov, the Russian cosmonaut, rescues pictures of his family from the exploding space station and thus also survives his trip. Max, Oscar and Rockhound, however, share a different fate. Choosing to spend their last night on earth in a strip club, drinking and wenching and eventually being arrested (which attests to society's depicted disapproval of their actions), both Max and Oscar pay for their deviance with their lives. Rockhound, whose pessimism leads him to expect and plan for his own death, accidentally finds salvation in a stripper who becomes infatuated with this apparently wealthy astronaut; he suffers a purgatory of madness on the asteroid in recompense for the illicitness of this relationship, but in the end is saved by it. He returns to earth and her arms, proclaiming his societally sanctioned wish to further validate the relationship by "having babies" with her. This redemption is confirmed when, in the final credit sequence, she catches the bouquet at Grace and AJ's wedding.

At the beginning of the film, when Harry is as distant from society as he can get, he is surrounded by unfettered phallic power. The physical potency embodied by the rig workers is one reason for the negative status of Harry's strained relationship with Grace, which has aspects of sexual jealousy. As the rig crew assert, they all participated in raising her, and so her relationship with AJ already has elements of incest; Harry's intense possessiveness suggests his own frustrated desire for Grace. AJ's youthful vigour is a threat to Harry's territorial dominance, and so possession of Grace becomes the symbol of the power for which the two men compete. There is a similar suggestion of possessiveness bordering on incest in *Deep Impact*. In a film that represents America as a self-contained universe and never looks outside this model, it is significant that both Jenny's parents are foreign; Jenny's mother is English,

her father German. Her separation from society is generated by this familial origin. The first time Jenny is seen in the context of her own family, she is at lunch with her mother Robin, both bitterly avoiding the wedding of Jenny's father, Jason, to Chloe, a woman only two years older than Jenny herself. Jenny's mother gives an imaginary play-by-play commentary on the wedding; Jenny is supporting Robin through the betrayal of her husband's remarriage. When Robin describes the ceremony, she refers to the celebrant as "priest", and is corrected by Jenny, who says "judge". This is a significant condemnation of Jason's marriage, as the absence of a priest indicates that there is no divine (and thus moral or social) blessing on the union, and Jason is committing spiritual bigamy. There are also aspects of incest in the sense that Jenny's father weds a woman so close in age to his daughter; the grotesque inversion of order present in Jenny's stepmother, who in age could be a sister (or Jenny herself), highlights the depicted perversity of this second marriage and the society that allows it, and provides an indication that Jenny is occupying an unnatural, antistructural, liminal world. As Robin Lerner looks sadly at the photo Jason will later use to symbolise and replace the family Jenny feels she has lost, Leo and Sarah kiss, pronounced "husband and wife". Those words, together with the shot of the photograph which depicts only Jason and Jenny, suggests an element of imbalance in the Lerner family structure previously hinted at by Jason's marriage to a girl of Jenny's age: Robin in one sense is removing herself from the equation so that the unnaturally intense relationship between her husband and daughter can be consummated in their shared death. This death is itself a final erasure of Robin and her family-oriented hopes, in that she had previously justified her own death by looking to the survival of her lineage; she says to Jenny: "I'm going to be happy as long as I know you're going to live."

The Oedipal triangle between AJ, Harry and Grace in *Armageddon* is similarly intricate. It is possible to view Harry and AJ as one and the same



person; or at least, two aspects of the same in separate contrasting embodiments, with the film depicting the process of reconciliation between the two. AJ represents all that is instinctual. He drills on hunches, gut feelings, and absolutely trusts his sensual intelligence. He is also joyful in his approach to society: he is uncynical about love, and when he is fired by Harry for his cavalier approach towards both Harry's authority on the oil rig and possession of Grace, he shows initiative and a spirit of free enterprise when he sets up a drilling operation of his own. Harry is unable to maintain the same balance between independence and society. Grace states that he is "handicapped by a natural immaturity", which manifests in selfish arrogance and emotional bankruptcy, and in atonement Harry must demonstrate his subjugation to his society by effectively choosing its preservation over his own. Harry, a repository for ideological dissonance and dissatisfaction, becomes the scapegoat for all of the societal deviance he embodies, and is implicitly tagged as such. Not counting Lev, a late addition, Harry has twelve 'disciples', a team of six from NASA and six of his own men; this is in keeping with his role as world saviour, a secularised Christ, and refers to the fact that his eventual death is a purging of sin, redeeming both himself and his society. Harry's link with Christ, also manifest in *Deep Impact*'s Spurgeon Tanner, raises several issues. In one sense the image of Christ, who from low beginnings rose to the status of God, represents a wish-fulfilment dream of destiny for a blue collar misfit like Harry. Western culture has recourse to Christianity as a spiritual history, if not heritage, and in the case of *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact* it works to bless and deify the working class white male. The Christian structure in these ostensibly secular apocalyptic films underscores the religious basis of society's founding principles, lending a holy aura to the conventions of the social.

In both films society is identified as predominantly white, working class and heterosexual. Those who differ are either destroyed early on (the

African-American taxi driver and his Korean passengers, as well as a Hawaiian street vendor in *Armageddon* are caricatured stereotypes, existing only to be hit by the first asteroid strike) or occupy non-threatening, submissive positions (Bear contributes little but strength, reduced to the bodily sphere). In *Deep Impact*, all the protagonists are white; the only prominent character who is not is the African-American President Beck; ironically his function is to create a sense of sameness in America through representing Christianity as a cultural truth. He acknowledges the disparate belief systems in America while saying “wishing is wrong” (displaying an orthodox rejection of what might be called ‘the occult’ or superstition, which in effect is a difference in terminology) before offering a Christian prayer for all. Beck’s survival and the success of the shuttle mission is a vindication of Christianity, and in effect, further homogenises an already exclusive society, defining America as Christian. The Christian concept of god is adopted as the way America understands its spirituality, and it is used as a reinforcement for the status quo, justifying and idealising the American (as a) spiritual state.

The explicit recognition and clarification of the important contribution of sacrificial victims in *Armageddon* is encountered at the site of the Apollo 1 launch. The scene begins with a shot of Grace’s blurred reflection in a pool of water, an undefined, disembodied face which turns away as Harry in voice-over calls “Gracie?”. It is an image of Grace’s reflection in both senses of the word; it reveals her contemplation over her changing relationship with her father, and her as yet incomplete transformation of role, which accounts for her inability to see herself clearly. As Harry’s tentatively reductive naming of her suggests, she is reverting from a mother figure back into a daughter in the face of her father’s assumption of responsibility, but neither are sure of the extent of this gradual change. This sense of Harry’s rise in status, in contrast to the more playful dominance he demonstrates in his dealings with NASA, is part of the incorporation stage of his ritual process. While NASA is the

embodiment of obsolete, ineffectual authority and truth that is challenged by the carnivalesque liminal, the domesticity and civilisation represented by Grace is a positively constructed vision of communality; the progression in her relationship with Harry is indicative that he is on the correct path to redemption. The launch site is a ruin, a barren monument to sacrifice; the final shot shows a plaque that reads: "In memory of those who made the ultimate sacrifice so others could reach for the stars." It refers to the three astronauts of Apollo 1 who died in a fire that swept through the cabin just prior to launch; in acknowledging their deaths as part of a progression, the sentiment also sanctifies Harry's contribution as not just a preservation of life, but of all human achievement to follow.

While Harry's rite of passage is completed in his death, the triumph and reward of his action is his incorporation back into society in his rebirth as AJ. Throughout the film, AJ and Harry are represented as being almost identical incarnations of the same person, which is the source of their rivalry. The film describes a process of Harry's gradual descent into death, which coincides with AJ's rise into manhood, and where at the outset these two as yet undefined males are in conflict, their liminal journeys will see them finally amalgamate in a whole that eclipses the sum of its parts. Harry's death lies in his progressive assumption of responsibility and alignment with the official world. During the simulation training of the rig crew, AJ ignores the guidance of the simulation computer and fails the exercise. He argues that the computer is based more in conservatism than reality, and that his experience and instinct count for more, a statement that parallels Harry's earlier remonstrance with Quincy and Truman that drilling is "a science, an art". Harry, however, is increasingly moving into alignment with official repression of renegade individuality. He tells AJ: "Those men in that room have zero tolerance for showing off, hot-dogging, going by your gut instinct or you trying to be a hero." This institutional conservatism and inflexible demand for

robotic, order-driven conformists is part of the dehumanising corruption of NASA that has brought them to this crisis point. It has legitimated itself right out of the pioneering spirit in which it bases its glory, forgetting that the reason for involving the roughnecks at all was precisely the undisciplined but absolute proficiency NASA was helpless to replicate. The fact that Harry sides with NASA in this confrontation demonstrates his wearing down by official authority; he becomes part of the old world order which is dying. Later, at the launch, as AJ serenades Grace, Harry says disapprovingly to Chick: "That boy can't take anything seriously," to which Chick replies, "Yeah; reminds me of a guy I used to know." This exchange shows Chick's censure of Harry's dour association with the official sphere, especially during what is a liminal, celebrational time of disproportionate status for the rig crew; but it also sets up the agent of Harry's salvation, his connection with AJ.

The suggestion that Harry lives on, reborn into AJ, is supported by several scenes. During the "rock storm" on the asteroid, AJ is nearly lost when flying debris hurls him off the asteroid's surface into space. He is saved by his literal connection to Harry, a long strap clipped to both space suits at waist level. AJ, floating in space, appears at the end of an umbilical cord, the as yet unborn child; when Harry refuses to allow AJ the role of sacrificial victim, the cord is cut, allowing Harry's incorporation both into society and into the figure of his pseudo son, to whom he also passes his responsibilities as father. Bakhtin describes this as a symbolic representation of the process of carnival: "By cutting off the old, dying body, the umbilical cord of the new youthful world is broken."<sup>13</sup> Thus through AJ Harry is renewed, liberated from his old dying self to join Grace in marriage; the flash back/forward sequence at the moment of Harry's death contains images of Grace's real or idealised childhood (home movie shots of a child on a swing in a garden, a setting at odds with Grace's supposed tomboy childhood on the rig), reconciling the alienated relationship between the two, as well as images

which are later shown to be from her wedding to AJ. The sense that the vision of images is shared by Harry and Grace suggests that Harry lives on to not only witness the wedding, but to participate in it as his son/self weds his child bride. The sacrifice that marks the zenith of Harry's rite of passage is rewarded by the represented best that his society has on offer: uncynical, romantic, heterosexual Hollywood love.

The embodiment of social affiliation in *Deep Impact* is represented by astronaut Spurgeon Tanner, who occupies the position of sacrificial lamb and redeemer. His status as such is established immediately on his introduction. During the press conference, the president describes the space ship that will carry the astronauts to the asteroid: it is the largest ever constructed, and is named "the Messiah". The astronauts are then briefly interviewed, with special emphasis placed on Tanner, who has been included due to his experience with moon landings and shuttle missions. In the diegetic world of *Deep Impact*, Spurgeon is equivalent to Neil Armstrong. He is thus distinguished as part of the patriotic achievement of his country, a living American folk legend attesting to the glory of selfless heroism and the pioneering spirit. The significant naming of the shuttle gives Jenny further opportunity to declare her distance from this celebration of culture as she demands, "Isn't it true, sir, that not everyone in your administration believes the Messiah will save us?". This question has an important double meaning, in that Jenny is calling into question not only the human effort to save the world, but also the spiritual element to this process. In the context of the film, the word Messiah could be used interchangeably to denote the shuttle, an external, conceptual Christ or Spurgeon Tanner, whose responsibility it is to ensure the salvation of the world as proxy redeemer. The president offers a prayer later during the crisis, demonstrating his own faith in divine deliverance, but Jenny's doubt over the Messiah's power and the implication that there are those within the country's organising structure that have similar

misgivings signify the corruption and faithlessness that was seen earlier to represent a symbolic cause for the apocalyptic threat.

Jenny's question has a further relevance for Tanner: his own mission crew is made up of unbelievers. Oren Monash, the team leader, says to him "You're here because the powers that be think we need a familiar face on this trip. You're here for public relations". The young astronauts see Tanner as a liability, but they are shown in this scene to be judging him on their own jaded terms. In the previous scene, Mitch, ground control at Houston, asks Tanner his assessment of the Messiah crew, to which he replies, "heroes all", but there is an indication already that the young astronauts are more interested in their image than in the reality of self-sacrifice; with their exceptional training they believe they know all there is to know about their mission, which they do but only in theory, forgetting that pioneers like Tanner discovered the basis for that theory in the first place. Mitch refers to the media saturated pre-heroes dismissively, saying: "Well, they're not scared of dying; they're just scared of looking bad on TV". There is an emphasis on the notion of simulations; for the astronauts, TV presents a threat more real than death; and their critique of Tanner is based on their training on simulators, which they perceive as superior to experience. When Oren accuses Tanner of being a PR stunt, representing selfish vanity and posturing on behalf of the country, he is speaking from his own sense of pride; he is put in his place by Tanner's statement, "It's not a video game, son, it really isn't." To underscore his point, the Messiah's launch is shown via spliced-in footage of a real shuttle launch; the use of this genuine event is a commentary both on Oren's cynicism and on other films, such as *Armageddon*, which use computer graphics to such dazzling but artificial effect. The following scene completes the sense of realism, as a newsreader reports on the next stage of the mission: unlike every other news shot, in which the image is of a TV screen or of Jenny in the newsroom reading to another camera, this shot is not within a secondary

screen and the news is delivered straight down the camera; the effect is one of involvement in the action, a direct address that creates the illusion that the bulletin is genuine. The use of computer graphic diagrams in the newscast is a further comment on the illusory, aesthetic digital effects of *Armageddon*. There is a parallel, however, between the two films in the attitude to simulators and falseness in general: like the worship of idols, it is censured. AJ in *Armageddon* rejects the assessment of the drill training simulator in favour of his instinct and experience, as Tanner dismisses his crew's valuing of their training techniques over the importance of empirical knowledge.

The eventual sacrifice of the shuttle crew is made, true to the film's established thematic base, in the name of home. The astronauts are first introduced in the context of their families, at the celebratory, media-attended picnic in their honour. Andrea Baker, the only woman in the team, displays her maternal femininity by running after children for the entire scene, although only one of the many infants is her own. Oren is shown talking to his pregnant wife, and later is rewarded for his heroism by a son named for him, perpetuating his name and incarnation. When the first explosion fails, breaking the asteroid in two, Oren is the one to decide, "Let's go home", despite the fact that there will be no home to go to; the concept of home is for Oren transcendent of reality. Mark Simon discusses his upcoming wedding with his girlfriend, although there is tension between them over the issue of a church wedding, which he is against, saying "I don't do churches well"; Mark is spiritually redeemed by his sacrifice and says to her in final farewell, "promise me you'll keep doing your church thing...and I'll be there right next to you, haunting you." Gus Partenza is the only American member of the team who is without partner or child, which is indicated by his inability to talk to children at the picnic. Gus is the only one to die on the asteroid, and is thus uninvolved in the final sacrificial act, which he may have had no selfless reason to agree to. The Russian astronaut also has no apparent familial

connections, which like Jenny's foreign parents has the effect of locating the family/home dialectic firmly within the American context.

Home for Tanner is a unified sense of affection and duty to both family and culture, which in the context of the film represents the epitome of virtue. His adult sons, Dwight and Steve, are stoic and understanding of their father's repeated abandonment of them in favour of his space missions; in contrast to the tearing, screaming children of his team, Tanner's sons are obedient, quiet military men, with an obvious respect for their father; the only thing they say to his staunch farewell is "Yes, sir". They reflect the selfless patriotism that Tanner himself typifies, and in their mutual appreciation of the greater good, remain a close-knit, loving family, whose personal fears and distress are put aside for duty. In the final moments of the shuttle crew, when the astronauts say their final goodbyes to those closest to them, Tanner's sons are on active duty, and it is an unspoken assumption that this is more important. Tanner himself is energised by the impending sacrifice. It is his idea to pilot the ship into the interior of the asteroid and detonate the remaining nuclear weapons from there; the personal safety of himself or his crew never enter the equation. There is a suggestion that this action fulfils a sense of destiny for Tanner; he sees himself as a folkloric, legendary figure, comparing himself to a riverboat captain from *Huckleberry Finn*, and reading *Moby Dick* aloud to Oren, revelling in the mythic heroes of America's literary culture. When Mitch demands clarification of Tanner's plan, Tanner says, "We can do or we can teach, Mitch, what's your pleasure?" at once a celebration of the active, heroic spirit he manifests, and a damnation of official restraint and static, didactic authority, which like the simulators that trained his crew has little basis in reality.

The act of sacrifice that saves the earth and makes heroes of its victims is explicitly described as an act of incorporation, as Tanner, beginning his approach to the asteroid says to his crew, "We'll never be closer to home than



we are right now”, indicating that their act of selflessness brings them into closer alignment with their society, never more a part of it than in their dying for it. It is part of a spiritual journey for Tanner, as he sees his sacrifice for his cultural home as a method of regaining the personal home he has lost through the death of his wife; he looks to a photograph of his wife and children, taken around the time of his first moon landing, and says “Mary, I’m coming home.” While the other astronauts are facing the loss of their living partners, they come to appreciate the necessity and importance of their duty to ensure that human life continue irrespective of their own survival. Baker says wryly, “Look on the bright side: we’ll all have high schools named after us”, a sentiment echoed by the president’s final speech which ends the film, in which he recognises the importance of the process of threat and renewal. He lauds the sacrificial victims and commemorates their contribution with a litany of cultural dominance and immortality: “Cities fall, but they are rebuilt; heroes die, but they are remembered. We honour them with every brick we lay, every field we sow; with every child we comfort, then teach to rejoice in what we have been regiven: our planet; our home.”

The films represent a popular discourse on eschatology. There is a strong sense in both *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact* that the only end worth considering is the end of American cultural history. In both films, different cities around the world are destroyed; in fact, most of the world would have been destroyed in *Deep Impact*’s tidal wave, but there are only images from America, East and West coast cities juxtaposed to create a sense of universal destruction. There is also a sense that America is not its people, but a concept and a history; the saving of artefacts over people indicates that human losses are irrelevant if a remnant remains to rebuild and pass on the heritage. What will prevail over the apocalypse is the symbolic immortality of the people, preserved by the mortal sacrifice of a physical messiah.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Kermode, F. *The Sense of an Ending*. 1967 quoted in Martin, J. and Ostwalt, C. (eds.) *Screening the Sacred*. Boulder: Westview Press Inc. 1995 p.62
- <sup>2</sup> Van Gennep, A. *The Rites of Passage*. trans. Vizedom, M. and Caffee, G. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- <sup>3</sup> Bromley, D. *Constructing Apocalypticism*. in Robbins, T. and Palmer, S. (eds.) *Millennium, Messiahs and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, New York: Routledge 1997 p.38
- <sup>4</sup> This recalls Revelation 6:15 "Then all the kings of the earth, the governors and the commanders, the rich people and the men of influence, the whole population, slaves and citizens, hid in caverns and among the rocks."
- <sup>5</sup> Turner, V. *From Ritual to Theatre*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1992 p.24
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Bakhtin, M. (trans. Iswolsky, H.) *Rabelais And His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p.26
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid. pp.19-20
- <sup>9</sup> Bakhtin, M. 1984:212
- <sup>10</sup> Kermode, F. *Waiting for the End* in Bull, M. (ed.) *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd 1995 p.250
- <sup>11</sup> Torrance, R. *The Spiritual Quest: Transcendence in Myth, Religion and Science*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, p.12
- <sup>12</sup> Torrance, 1994:12
- <sup>13</sup> Bakhtin 1984:200

## Chapter II

### The Threat of Replacement: Repelling the

#### Alien Other in

#### *Independence Day and The Arrival.*

We try to make sense of a historical disaster by interpreting it according to the strictest teleological model, as the climax of a bitter trajectory whose inevitable outcome it must be...The reward of fitting even catastrophic events into a coherent global schema is the pleasure of comprehension, the satisfaction of the human urge to make sense out of every occurrence, no matter how terrible.<sup>1</sup>

The apocalyptic premise of asteroids on a collision course with earth lends itself to interpretations of divine retribution, as the odds of such an event actually occurring are minimal. In the films examined in the previous chapter, the “act of God” interpretation of global destruction supports the moralistic, reiterative structures of genre film, implying a set of values whose violation precipitated the threat. Salvation, or at least survival, results from atonement, reinstating the neglected values. Alignment with the community and its moral structures is celebrated as the agent of both spiritual and physical (genetic) immortality, the price and reward of the perpetuation of life.

The asteroid scenario is in several senses similar to another ostensibly secular eschatology: the alien invasion. Two recent films, *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 1996) and *The Arrival* (David Twohy, 1996) will serve as examples of the place alien invasion films hold in the apocalyptic film genre. The two films, while both presenting a premise involving extraterrestrial invaders looking to colonise earth, differ in the invaders’ methods of removing

the human impediment. In the tradition of such films as *War of the Worlds* (Byron Haskin, 1953), the aliens of *Independence Day* opt to visit sudden, violent and obvious carnage on the cities of earth, confident that swift extermination precludes the possibility of reprisal or defence. *The Arrival* employs the opposite strategy in that the aliens, whose first priority is the adjustment of earth's temperature to their needs (a reflection of the proposed human terraforming and colonisation of Mars), assume human identities to infiltrate government departments and official institutions. In contrast to the spectacular devastation of *Independence Day*, *The Arrival*'s subtle conspirators are evocative of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Seigel, 1956). The premise for neither film is new, but the context of invasion is utilised in each to address specific present-day concerns about whether humanity deserves the planet it occupies. Environmental issues are paramount in both films: humans and aliens are in conflict over the earth's resources. As it is clear in both films that humans are already wantonly exploitative of these resources, the acquisitive aliens serve as a monstrous, demonised manifestation of human rapaciousness; in *Independence Day* the aliens are compared to locusts, stripping the earth and moving on, a metaphor that carries an implicit judgement on human behaviour towards both land and other cultures. Similarly, but more explicitly damning of such behaviour, the aliens of *The Arrival* represent the consequence of human obtuseness and indifference towards increasing environmental pollution and global warming: a self-inflicted end of humanity.

The spectre of destruction from without carries with it a sense that the danger is not only of annihilation, as was the case in *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact*, but also of replacement. In a situation that recalls the original Fall of Man, the world is to be confiscated; it will remain, but humanity will not be permitted to live in it. While the external invader seems to remove any sense of human guilt for the world's end, it is actually a comment on human imperialism and negligence. Implicated in the cultural reference to Eden is the sense that the

end is society's fault: like Adam and Eve, vanity and neglect has resulted in potential exile. Both films depict societal degeneracy as a moral fable on the meaning of death. From resistance to destruction emerge motives for living, as the protagonist's discovery and endorsement of these motives allows the society to redefine itself, to have its validity as a social structure confirmed in the confrontation of an external invader who represents 'otherness'.

Before the discovery of the apocalyptic crisis, there are indications of social and personal upheavals that parallel and reflect problems within the founding structures of the society, including corruption and disillusionment in official institutions. It is the precondition of spiritual death, that is, a waning of belief in society that demands the cleansing, regenerating aspects of the apocalyptic. Whether the resultant saved society at the end of each apocalyptic film is representative of a New Jerusalem, in the sense of a new phase of existence on the other side of a purging death, or a celebration of triumph over personal mortality, achieved through locating society as the centre of existence, there is a sense of a ritualised cleansing of dissent and internal conflict and a reaffirmation of social boundaries and definitions.

In *Independence Day* the crisis is defined primarily as a lack of conviction, examined through several examples of social discord. The film's opening sequence provides a testament to a society clinging to its former glory: it begins on a close-up of the American flag, which is unfurled as if proudly flying in the wind, yet it is motionless; it is literally frozen. It is revealed to be the flag placed at the site of the moon landing, a symbol of American cultural conquest. A shot of the astronauts' footprints, supposed to last forever as a monument to human achievement, shows them being filled in by vibrations from the massive alien spacecraft as it passes overhead, plunging the landing site into shadow. This erosion of the evidence of American domination creates a sense of stalled development, of antique glory that has no modern counterpart. The flag is frozen not only in the literal sense, but also in time, indicative of a

presumed cultural superiority based in obsolescence. There are several indications in the film that the government and its supportive institutions have fallen into decadence. When the alien signal is discovered, chaos ensues: Major Mitchell, hurrying to inform the Secretary of Defence, has to prompt an underling to open a door for him, showing a laxness in the discipline and respect for rank that should characterise a military institution. The Major's call finds the Secretary sleeping, a sign that complacency has led to a lack of vigilance.

President Whitmore (Bill Pullman), first seen working even in bed, seems an exception to this model, but it is soon revealed via a television panel show that the president has "an approval rating of less than 40%" with the general public. The president was an Air Force pilot in the Gulf war, which aided his election by a populace seeking strong leadership, but now he is seen as crippled by bureaucratic politicking. A commentator says of Whitmore, "They elected a warrior, and they got a wimp", a revealing statement, as it underscores the popular choice of a soldier to embody America's ideological hopes, and locates Whitmore's failings in effeminate weakness. Whitmore can be compared with *Armageddon*'s Dan Truman, incarnation of the mythic Fisher King's wounded virility, a leader whose impotence blights the fertility of his land and people. He is a representative of an authority that is dead in terms of its spiritual relevance and ideological integrity. Connie (Margaret Colin), his aide, chastises him for his weak public image and the faltering of his idealistic conviction, saying, "It's too much politics, it's too much compromise". Ironically it is Connie herself who is the agent of this compromise. She embodies the breakdown of social institutions in her role as failed woman/wife to the virtuous David (Jeff Goldblum), and she similarly affects the level of integrity in the government she works for: behind the scenes at the press conference she mouths the words to the president's speech, which suggests that she is the author. The presidency is thus reduced to image and posturing, the real power given to the speechwriters and spin doctors.

The public disappointment with Whitmore indicates that *Independence Day*'s America feels in need of leadership that will provide new affirmation of its supremacy, a social triumph to encourage solidarity and affiliation. The acquisitive power represented by both the moon landing and the Iwo Jima monument (a shot of which is used to signify Washington DC) is thirty years old; the Gulf war, being less of an ideological crusade than a cynical protection of US oil interests, has done nothing to substantiate it, as the figure of the ineffectual president and Gulf-veteran Whitmore reveals. The apocalyptic threat comes thus precisely at the point of greatest decadence, to act as an agent of renewal for a decaying empire.

The state of the governing, institutional world in *The Arrival* manifests similar aspects of corruption, but in a different form. The bureaucracy encumbers Whitmore because it lacks diligence, and the crisis is the retribution for that lack. In *The Arrival* the crisis has a more sinister origin in the figure of Gordian (Ron Silver), a NASA official who is a disguised alien invader. The infiltration of aliens into government institutions reveals the power of these institutions to control information. When Illana Green, a UCLA geoscientist, tries to obtain data on atmospheric pollution from NASA she is told the satellite that monitors such phenomena is broken; its replacement explodes seconds after launch. It is in the aliens' interest to prevent the spread of such information, as it would draw attention to their secret terraforming activities, but the depiction of such management of data implies a corrupt system operating without the knowledge or consent of the wider public. Gordian, when confronted by Zane Zeminsky (Charlie Sheen) draws a link to other apparently accidental failures, such as the Hubble telescope, using real-life references to support the conspiracy theory presented by the film. A similar critique of governmental restriction of information is the depiction of Area 51 in *Independence Day*, in which the secrecy surrounding the Roswell landings has left the earth's populace ignorant and vulnerable to attack. The governmental corruption of *Independence Day* is

at least human, however; in *The Arrival*, even bureaucracy can be seen as part of the alien conspiracy. When Zane and Calvin discover the radio signal that alerts them to the alien presence, they immediately turn to the “Detection Protocol”, a checklist method of obtaining an officially confirmed result, but it takes so long to complete that the signal is lost. The rule at NASA, according to Gordian, is “If you can’t confirm it, it doesn’t exist”, indicating an organisation that does not trust its members, and which smothers its discoveries in volumes of red tape. Organisations such as SETI and the launching of doomed satellites provide the veneer of sincere research, the facade of a quest for knowledge disguising an underbelly of deceit and obfuscation.

Zane is a product of the dissonance created by such a regime; unable to find his place within it, he rebels. Unfulfilled by society, he looks outside it for answers, making a religion out of his quest for proof of life beyond earth, seeking not spiritual, but physical transcendence. His lack of faith in his society derives from its inability to provide him with spiritual nourishment; it is the benefits gained from membership to society that justify its imposition of rules, and for Zane, those benefits are negligible. His discoveries are ignored, and his constant quest for meaning, for something greater than the everyday, is met with indifference and repression from official spheres. When he explains his hopes for alien contact, such as the discovery of an extraterrestrial cancer cure, he is expressing his desire to justify a move back towards society; if the aliens value human life, as well as contact and association with it, so can Zane. *The Arrival* is more pessimistic in tone than *Independence Day*, and therefore its protagonist manifests a cynicism less apparent in the characters of the latter film; such disillusionment with society is present only in minor characters such as Jasmine’s stripper friend, who joins fellow misfits on a rooftop to welcome the aliens. Around her are hand-lettered signs including “Please, take me away”, expressing misplaced hopes of fulfilment outside society. These unaffiliated are punished, the first to die when the methodical eradication begins.



One of the reasons for this fatal chastising of the lapsed is a prevailing sense of “sovereign humanity” in these films. Zane’s near-worship of the stars in *The Arrival*, and the faith in the aliens’ benevolent superiority demonstrated by the rooftop crowds in *Independence Day*, are the most fervent demonstrations of belief in any form of deity. When that trusting belief is shown to be misplaced, it denies the possibility of fulfilment outside society, and in effect punishes the seekers. This suggests that the apocalyptic threat acts as a purgation of society’s malcontents, sparing the righteous affiliates. However, while the environmental context can be seen to identify the apocalypse as punishment for human failings, the vanquishing of the supernatural agent of retribution seems to negate the impact of an avenging God and to place divine power within the context of the community. The social system becomes the worshipped entity, inclusion its greatest reward; the adversary is the outsider whose differing society threatens schism. In one sense society thus represents God, having power over the imposition of codes of behaviour, punishment for transgression and the promise of transcendence, both in terms of the genetic immortality of procreation and in the sense of representing a social definition for its members, that is, membership to society is an identity above and beyond that of the autonomous self. On the other hand, society utilises the Judeo-Christian structures already in place, such as laws, festivals and moral values, to support and vindicate its rule, using its religious origins as a qualification for power. For example, in *Independence Day*, at Jasmine and Steven’s wedding, David and Connie hold hands; the close-up of their joined hands is juxtaposed with a shot of the American flag, tying the Christian chapel to the army base that houses it (supporting the military defence of society), then to the bond of marriage, (a socio-religious regulator of sexuality which also officialises procreation), and finally to the American flag, throughout the film a symbol of idealism, conquest and moral virtue. In this case adherence to society is equated to the service of God, making it a holy activity. In terms of the apocalyptic film, the link, almost

a blur in definition between God and society, is enhanced through the protagonist's identification with Christ, and the sense that humanity as a whole is a spiritual manifestation of goodness threatened by an evil that originates outside.

The American cultural dominance seen in *Deep Impact* and *Armageddon* also manifests in *Independence Day* and *The Arrival*, and the invader signifies a cultural clash that weakens the power structure and professions of superiority in the invaded territory. *The Arrival* employs classical metaphor to illustrate the cultural problems of conquest. Gordian's name refers to the Gordian Knot, the unsolvable puzzle that confronted Alexander the Great. The prize for untying the knot was the conquest of the city of Gordium. Alexander, rather than untie it, cut the knot in two with his sword and won the city. The film's reference to this legendary act reverses the consequence. Gordian, as the invader, represents the dilemma which must be solved, the prize being not the acquisition but the retaining of earth. Zane eventually does cut Gordian in two; in risking his life to retrieve the taped evidence of the alien plot, he cuts off Gordian's arm with a fire axe. This action demonstrates Zane's identification of Gordian's inhumanity and the accompanying declaration of war. What it indicates is the necessity of not acceding to the terms of the other; to attempt to untie the knot would be an acceptance of the other's rules, and the weakening of one's own culture. The solution to the puzzle is unequivocal resistance.

*Independence Day* has a similar response to the invasion issue. In defence against the invader, the world becomes united in common effort. However, while this would seem to suggest an acceptance of difference within humanity, this is not the case. The final battle combines the efforts of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant President Whitmore, the African-American Steven, and the Jewish David. However, the rest of the world is shown to be utterly reliant on America's efforts to repel the aliens, making the earth not united but triumphantly conquered by American technological and ideological dominance.

This contributes to the cult of society already established in the films: the suggestion is that adherence to America will save both our physical and spiritual life.

The four Horsemen<sup>2</sup>, harbingers of apocalypse who in Revelation embody the permanent trials of man, are represented in both films. In *The Arrival*, the heatwave brings Famine to drought-prone areas; Illana watches a television broadcast of starving people in the Sudan. In *Independence Day*, Albert Nimzicki, the Secretary of Defence, is War, advocating nuclear strikes against the aliens, irrespective of the fact that they will also kill any human survivors. Whitmore, whose spiritual trial comes in the form of his paternal responsibility for his people, argues with Nimzicki about what constitutes their charge: “You’re saying that at this point we should sacrifice more innocent American civilians, is that right?” to which Nimzicki responds, “Sir, if we don’t strike soon there may not be much of an America left to defend.” Nimzicki’s commitment is to an abstract concept, an America made up of ideals and physical landmass, its platonic form, whereas Whitmore sees America as the sum of its people. Nimzicki’s indifference to the survival of the populace is as evil as the alien’s active annihilation.

Pestilence, the third Horseman, is not greatly represented in apocalyptic film, except within its own subgenre of virus films such as *Twelve Monkeys* (Terry Gilliam, 1995). It could be argued that in terms of the apocalyptic scenarios in *The Arrival* and *Independence Day*, the aliens can be seen as a plague, but an environmental pestilence is also evident, with similar implications for human life. The alien invasion/infestation provides an immediate and tangible threat to human survival and establishes an adversary that can be coded as evil, but they can also be seen as metaphorical embodiments of an environmental apocalypse for which humans are responsible. Environmental issues are introduced early in both films; in *The Arrival* the prefacing scene shows Illana Green (Green for ecology, Ill for sickness), clothed like an

astronaut against the Arctic cold, in an incongruous poppy field. She herself seems an alien, in unfamiliar surroundings, but it is the poppies that are out of place; a sign of extreme global warming, their red petals are heralds of human death.

The aliens of *The Arrival* are in the process of a silent invasion, increasing the global temperature to accommodate their needs. While this will certainly mean death for humans, the aliens are not as explicitly evil as those in *Independence Day*. As Gordian explains to Zane, “We’re just finishing what you started...If you can’t tend to your own planet, none of you deserve to live here.” The aliens themselves practice what they preach. Their cover operation, PlanetCorp Industries, goes by the slogan “Leaders in clean air technology”, which seems ironic considering the greenhouse gases their facilities pump out, but which in fact describes their eventual aim: a planet well cared for. The alien hitmen are under cover as gardeners, and in raiding Zane’s house leave the garden immaculate; alien-in-disguise Kiki takes out the recycling. Humans, by contrast, hubristically contemplate the terraforming of Mars, attracted more to dreams of conquest than with the prosaic maintenance of earth. The aliens have been forced from their own planet by their dying sun; humans have no such excuse. The film ends with the broadcast of Gordian’s confession speech; the broadcast is a triumph of sorts, as it indicates that Zane will succeed in exposing the alien conspiracy, but the final words are Gordian’s and reiterate his message that our misused planet is testament to our lack of deserving.

In *Independence Day* environmental concern is primarily located in the figure of David who warns his father against styrofoam and polices his office’s recycling procedures. The aliens are his Goliath, “locusts” who devour the resources of a planet and move on to the next, a process not dissimilar to that proposed by the terraformer of *The Arrival*. The comparison to locusts invokes a

sense of biblical retribution,<sup>3</sup> a plague of punishment that reflects an ecological guilt, systematically underpinned by repeated descriptions of the aliens being like humans: “They’re not all that dissimilar to us...breathes oxygen, comparable tolerances to heat, cold...Their bodies are just as frail as ours.” The comparison is damning for the citizens of earth, as the rapacious invader is a demonised reflection of human conduct.

With the future of the (human American) world at stake, the narrative specific to the (usually male) protagonist describes a ritual cleansing/purging of the elements which threaten a unified society: dissension, deviance, isolation. The ritual subjects are selected by their own rejection of, or alienation (sic) from society. The protagonist undergoes a process that sees him move from his separated state through a transitional, liminal space in which order is inverted; it is a place on the cusp of decisions, organised around the juxtaposition of opposites: good and evil, life and death, human and inhuman. The success of the outcome for the planet depends on the personal spiritual trial of the protagonist; his choice for himself is the choice borne by society. In the case of the alien invader film, the subject’s affiliation to his society is in response to an ‘inhuman’ merciless destruction.

The spiritual trial involves a choice between good and evil, or sin and virtue; if in these films it can be said that community represents the divine, then virtue is affiliation with the society and its fundamental moral structures. The subject’s journey in these films is measured via his relationships with others and the microcosm of society represented by the nuclear family, a structure which exemplifies a monogamous, heterosexual, and above all, sanctioned social unit. The state of a protagonist’s home and family at the outset is an indication of how far he will travel. In *Independence Day* four characters vie for the position of protagonist, each of their trials describing a similar trajectory. David, who wastes his genius in menial tasks, is called to offer his life to the service of his

community. Steven Hiller (Will Smith) is willing to offer his life to his country but is afraid that matrimonial commitment to Jasmine, his stripper girlfriend, will taint his reputation and prevent him from achieving the glory of becoming an astronaut; his journey is towards humility, both in terms of his social status and his service to his society. Russell Casse is a Viet Nam veteran, cast adrift without purpose on the edges of society; his ultimate death is a celebration of his belonging, as he sacrifices himself in the joy of being needed by his community. Each of these subplots presents a complete spiritual journey, describing individual responses to personal confrontations of evil and death, and each of these protagonists is eventually found worthy. However, while the contributions of these successful ritual subjects help effect the salvation of the world, it is the president whose destiny most comprehensively embodies the fate of his society.

President Whitmore's family seems at first to be a loving, functional unit, comprising the president, his wife Marilyn, and their small daughter. The family, however, is separate; the First Lady is in another part of the country and in her place is Connie, David's ex-wife, taking up space in another marriage. The family's distance from each other is echoed in their residence at the White House, which is more a symbol of office than a home; its space and grandeur underscores Whitmore's inadequacy as a president; he has so far failed to fill the physical and semiological space he has been elected to. Whitmore's daughter, who is in his charge, is a microcosm or embodiment of his parental duty to his country. She is always with him, and her trusting, innocent safety depends on his success in the rite of passage. In the absence of his wife, Whitmore allows his daughter indulgences such as late night television, a situation which reflects his undisciplined administration of his other charge, his country. It is Whitmore's weakness and indecision which is punished by the loss of his wife, a direct result of his early vacillations. As previously indicated, the president's spiritual trial involves a conflict between his convictions and his advisors, who

offer the temptation of negligence and irresponsibility. While the aliens can be seen to represent the figure of Antichrist, threatening evil rule that is the consequence of failure in the spiritual trial that equates to a personal battle of Armageddon, Nimzicki and Connie are false prophets, sowing indecision and in effect aiding the invader.

In *The Arrival*, family is represented through Zane's relationship with Char. In an early scene Zane is working late at SETI; a photo of himself and Char is taped to a monitor next to a note reminding him to call her, which is revealing of her position in his thoughts and priorities. Staring past the photo at the monitor, which previously showed evidence of the alien radio transmission, he sees "Nothing.". A shot of a poster asking "Are We Alone?" is ironic, as Zane is not alone and yet cannot accept it. He is nonetheless sexually possessive of Char: when she calls him from a bar, he demands that she go home, and later accuses her of affairs with her co-workers. Like David's inability to trust Connie, punching the president on suspicion of an encroachment on his territory, Zane assumes Char will betray him and himself does nothing to encourage her fidelity. Extreme sexual jealousy is a sign of disfunction in relationships, indicating a lack of trust and an imbalance in gender roles and contributing to a wider social instability.

Zane's home is a shrine to his antisocial religion, with a balcony from which to gaze at the stars and a bedroom painted with them. His attic becomes a makeshift observatory, and thus for Zane the focal point of the house. Char never enters Zane's sacred attic; the bedroom is as far as she gets, and even then does not command his full attention. Throughout their only intimate encounter in the film, Zane avoids looking at Char; she is behind him, or he is focused on an alien finger-puppet, playing out a mini-encounter. Char appeals to him in a statement that encapsulates the predominant theme of the film: "If we're going to make it we have to take care of our problems here, on planet earth, and that's a little hard when you're always off looking at the stars." This applies not

merely to Zane and Char's relationship but also to the environmental issues presented by the film, and it carries an admonition of the commandeering mentality exemplified by the terraformer and the aliens themselves: the desire to colonise and dominate new territory exceeding the proper sense of responsibility for the old. Zane's response to Char is a correction of her phrasing: he is not looking, but "listening" to the stars. There is a recurring motif in the film of aids to perception: visual and aural equipment such as satellite dishes and Walkmans, glasses and telescopes, possibly a comment on the blindness of society to its decadence and ecological destruction, but in the context of Char and Zane's relationship it is ironic, as he does not hear her. Zane's path is towards awareness of Char's value to him, a worth which can be identified in Gordian's Detection Protocol: if you cannot confirm it, it doesn't exist. Char exists to confirm Zane's existence, in the literal sense of corroborating his conspiracy theory, and in the sociological sense of their relationship providing a social context and definition for Zane.

The spiritual trial takes place in sacred time and space, outside the norms of the everyday world. It is a parallel or re-enactment of the biblical battle of Armageddon, the final conflict between Christ and Satan, deciding whether good or evil will rule and which will be vanquished forever. In the context of apocalyptic film the battle is fought within the self of the protagonist, himself containing potential for both good and evil. The battle is a rite of passage, in which the subject's complacency with his own ambivalence to the decadent world is challenged through confrontation with elements of a supernatural, antistructural world outside of his experience or control. This world is neither fully earth nor fully transcendent of earth, but rather the cusp between, the moment of transition, and in it societal expectations, conventions and rules are suspended. For the subject, the time of trial is located between life and death, a final test before the soul is judged. The reward for a successful outcome, one which proves predominant moral goodness in the subject's character, is life,



whether the transcendent passage into eternal life or into its earthly counterpart, escape from death into a jubilant, transformed world. In keeping with the deification of community that is prevalent in both *Independence Day* and *The Arrival*, the prize is the latter, a vindication of humanity's supremacy and the possession and renewed solidarity of earth.

For President Whitmore, the rite begins with the separation from the known occasioned by the alien destruction of the White House. He and his entourage, including David, Connie and Julius escape in Air Force One, placing physical distance as a parallel to the ritual spiritual distance maintained by a subject from his society. The processual stages of the journey are marked with symbols of the bizarre and marginal, indicating a period of disorder and inversion; the unfamiliar terrain of the spiritual trial divests the subject of his former security and power, levelling the playing field so that it is the person, not the wealth or rank that is tested. For Whitmore this means the impotence of watching a superior force destroy the country he had governed. His liminal process takes place in the mythic, pop-folkloric space of Area 51; its existence was previously kept secret even from him, which reduces the power of the presidency to mere figurehead status. Like NASA's sabotaged satellites in *The Arrival*, military and government institutions are criticised for their absolute power to control information, which in both cases leaves the public in dangerous ignorance.

The underground base of Area 51 is a grotesque, self-contained world; president Whitmore enters its depths like Christ after his crucifixion descending into Hell. It displays elements of the carnival and the asylum, signifiers of strangeness and difference. Everything at Area 51 is red, white and blue, a distorted reflection of the American flag. The White House survivors are greeted by the consummate mad professor, the improbably named Dr Brakish Okun whose aspect is more that of a patient than a figure of authority, saying, "They don't let us out much". Okun's position as head of the institute is a

parody of Whitmore's official rule. Like a carnival barker he introduces what he refers to as "the freak show", the glass coffins containing dead, preserved aliens; he officiates at another gruesome spectacle, the autopsy of the alien captured by Steven. Okun is Whitmore's guide through the first stages of the liminal, a phase in which, according to Turner:

The bizarre becomes the normal, and where through the loosening of connections between elements customarily bound together in certain combinations, their scrambling and recombining in monstrous, fantastic, and unnatural shapes, the novices are induced to think, and think hard, about cultural experiences they had hitherto taken for granted.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the liminal is a space of confrontation, presenting a distorted reflection of the self, exaggerating facade and hypocrisy, exposing weakness and celebrating the regenerative possibilities of confusion and uncertainty. For Whitmore it is a place in which to contemplate the limits of his own power and the blame he carries for his indecisive administration, which has allowed corruption to flourish. His trial involves a temptation towards evil which comes in the form of Nimzicki, advocate of war. The death of Dr Okun in the autopsy room is an invitation to Whitmore to retaliate in kind, using violence against the violent aliens. Whitmore concedes, and authorises the use of nuclear weapons despite the destruction they will bring to earth; this decision, which lowers him to the same reckless evil of the aliens, is a setback in his spiritual progress. Suffused with anger, he is a sitting target for temptation, and fails the first test.

Zane's liminal process in *The Arrival* similarly begins with a physical, spatial journey which separates him from his society. Zane follows a radio signal to Mexico, and enters a world on the cusp of death, marking a sacred space for his journey. His arrival in Mexico coincides with the Day of the Dead festival, a celebration commemorating the single day each year the spirits of the deceased are permitted to return to visit the living. This festival is a conflation of

traditional cultural Mexican philosophies of death and spirituality with the more recently imported Christian festival of Hallowe'en and All Souls' Day. The Day of the Dead celebrates victory over death, and reveals a cyclic conception of time in which death does not mean a final exit from earth. The Christian conception of time is linear, as can be discerned from the structure of the bible, which begins at Genesis, the world's creation, and ends with the apocalypse. Death is followed by a final, separate existence (or non-existence, in the case of the damned) in a transcendent space; there is no reincarnation or return to earth after the finality of the apocalypse. The apocalyptic film, however, in attributing power over the outcome to the human players in the drama, owes more to cyclic interpretations of time, depicting ritualised processes of danger averted via sacrifice and professions of socio-spiritual affiliation. In this model there is no ultimate death; instead, the world moves through a repeated sequence of decline and renewal, like the change of seasons or phases of the moon. The world that is renewed at the end of both *The Arrival* and *Independence Day* is less the Christian concept of a New Jerusalem than a worship of prevailing humanity.

Zane faces his own mortality in the streets of Oaxaca, guided into danger by demonic aliens who make excessive, theatrical attempts on his life, using scorpions and the curious combination of dilapidated hotel floors and an overfull bathtub. Zane chases his would-be assassin through a parade of grotesque skull masks and huge skeleton puppets, the image of death impeding his movement forward, challenging his progress. Later, like Christ and President Whitmore before him, Zane descends into the hell of the PlanetCorp facility, a fiery underground complex made up of visceral tunnels and pipes. The recurring motif of visual and aural attempts at clarity of perception in the film culminates in Zane's finally seeing the aliens for what they are: outsiders with no desire to share their superior knowledge, in an avaricious process of conquest.

Zane's temptation comes in the form of a sexual proposition. Illana, seemingly a kindred spirit in the unfamiliar liminal, in fact offers the danger of sin. Illana suggests that Zane share her hotel room, but he refuses in favour of his obligations to Char, even though he fears their relationship may be over. This is the start of a breakthrough for Zane's spiritual progress, as it is the first time he has taken his relationship with Char into consideration; it is also the saving of him, as Illana's bed is literally and metaphorically full of scorpions. Zane is rewarded for his fidelity with Char's forgiveness for his earlier jealousy; Illana, for her role as temptress, is paid the wages of sin, which are always death.

While the stages of ritual defined by Turner and van Gennep help to clarify the structure of apocalyptic film, showing the progression of the protagonist and the purpose of each stage in stronger relief, the implications for the protagonist reach further than his/her own individual passage into a new phase of life. There is a social function for the journey, a redemption and salvation that is both physical and spiritual. The protagonist occupies the position of Christ, a paradigmatic representative, whose affiliation with society ultimately cleanses and renews it. Like Christ, whose death on the cross enacted a cleansing of sin for the faithful, the protagonist is called to demonstrate his/her selfless adherence to society with a sacrifice, the penalty for former social and personal deviance.

The last stage of the ritual subject's journey is incorporation, the return of the transformed initiate to his society. Unlike the protagonists of the previous chapter, the redemptions of both Whitmore and Zane occur without the sacrifice of their lives; they both willingly risk their lives, however, and there is also a sense that the rest of their lives will be spent in similar service to their society. Whitmore, who lost his wife to distance because of early indecision, loses her to death in punishment after the nuclear weapons fail, and reevaluates the advice of the Secretary of Defence. It is the firing of Nimzicki and the

assumption of parental responsibility by Whitmore that enacts the salvation of the world and of himself. He volunteers his services as a pilot in demonstration of his commitment to the strong warrior leadership he was intended for, and rejects the facade of spin-doctored speeches with a spontaneous address to the assembled pilots.

Zane's redemption lies in his ultimate test: trusting Char. Zane's suspicion of Char is prevalent throughout, originally having its basis in sexual jealousy and later developing into the fear that she is an alien. The ultimate reason for Zane to mistrust Char is that she is thoroughly aligned with the society he believes to be corrupt; she calls the police on Zane, attesting to her belief in social institutions. The moment of decision comes in the final confrontation with the aliens. Zane chains a door shut against them, but must let go of the chain to set up the satellite transmission that will reveal the alien plot. Char offers to hold it, and Zane, in a reluctant but decisive leap of faith, trusts her with not only his life, but with the emotional vulnerability that lay beneath his early jealousy; consequently, Zane also places his trust in the societal ideology that the heterosexual union represents, locating within it his hopes of fulfilment and not being alone. The selfless crusade to protect society by distributing the videotape of Gordian's confession demonstrates his affiliation and reconciliation; he subjugates himself to the greater whole in a moral fable relating the importance of social solidarity.

The spiritual process which strengthens a subject's ties with his society has the consequential effect of revalidating that society. The protagonist's trial, which constitutes exposure to a world stripped of the familiar social elements, reinforces his appreciation of these; the choice of moral goodness equates to the acceptance of community values. This adherence to the social structure is the saving and renewal of it, as it requires the belief and consent of its members to survive. The resolution of each film is a demonstration that society is still valid,

that it still meets the ideological needs and wants of its constituents and inspires their devotion and sacrifice.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> M. Bernstein, *Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1994 p.13
- <sup>2</sup> Revelation 6:1-8; the horsemen are popularly rendered as War, Famine, Pestilence and Death. In Revelation, Pestilence is not a horseman in his own right, as the first horseman is Christ riding to victory . In the context of environmental apocalypse, it may be interesting to note that Death's horse is green (Rev 6:8).
- <sup>3</sup> In fact, the insect-like aliens of both *Independence Day* and *The Arrival* recall the locusts from the Abyss in Revelation 9:3-11, the plague released by the fifth trumpet, making them not only a plague but a sign of apocalypse.
- <sup>4</sup> Turner, V. *From Ritual to Theatre*. New York: PAJ Publications Ltd 1992 p.42

## SECTION TWO

### The Popular Christian Apocalyptic Film

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#### Chapter III

#### The Christian Apocalypse in Popular Film:

##### *The Omen and The Prophecy*

*The Omen* (Richard Donner, 1976) is perhaps the definitive apocalyptic film, spawning not only three sequels but also many imitators. It represents an early filmic manifestation of an already common literary formula: the utilisation of the bible's Book of Revelation as a parable of present times. Robbins and Palmer state that

A "millennial myth" of biblical origin is deeply ingrained in the American culture and represents a major cultural resource for the interpretation of unsettling events and trends...Present events and tensions are seen as an image or prototype of the ultimate decisive struggle between good and evil and its final resolution at the end of time.<sup>1</sup>

The biblical context serves as a template for the comprehension of current events, ascribing to them a semiological impact that goes beyond their immediacy. *The Omen* uses contemporaneous events, such as the return of the Jews to the Holy Land, as signs or evidence that the eschatological sequence of Revelation has begun, and from there builds a system of interpretation in fulfilment of St John's prophecies.

In contrast to *The Omen* series, *The Prophecy* (Gregory Widen, 1995) literally writes a new chapter to Revelation, advancing both the scope and implications of the apocalyptic myth. The premise of *The Prophecy* rests in a 23rd chapter of Revelation, dealing with a second angel war in Heaven. One of the consequences of the war is that there is no collection of human souls after death; until its resolution, death is final, the promises of a triumphant Christ left unfulfilled.

The structure of both films reflects the pattern seen in the ostensibly secular manifestations of the apocalyptic film genre. At the outset of each film there is shown to be a social crisis or problem, specifically illustrated or paralleled in an individual character's personal crisis. This issue is moral or spiritual in nature and reflects a decadence in the society, which precipitates the apocalypse. In *The Omen* the crisis is one of corruption and personal weakness which begins a chain reaction that grows into a global threat. Ambassador Robert Thorn (Gregory Peck), the protagonist, is tempted in the opening scenes with a sin. His own child is born dead, or so he is told; another baby is born at the same time, and the single mother dies in childbirth. The priest at the hospital, a false prophet in the guise of piety, coaxes Thorn into a lie, saying, "God has given you a son," when in reality the devil has taken his son and given a demon in its place. Thorn, unwilling to tell his wife Katherine (Lee Remick) of their child's death, accepts the lie, adopting the newborn Antichrist as his own. The crucial lie to his wife and the world advances the Antichrist's rise to power, and makes Thorn an unwitting affiliate of Satan. Thorn's life itself becomes a lie. When he and his wife take the toddler Damien for a walk in the early stages of the film, the child pulls behind him a toy dog on wheels; the image mocks the ideological 'perfection' of the American nuclear family they represent, a fake dog, a fake child, a dream built on foundations of deceit. Beneath the veneer of perfection the family gradually becomes corrupted. Katherine Thorn becomes suspicious of



her child, but bitterly acknowledges that the artificial image of happiness comes before her instincts: “What could be wrong with our child, Robert? We’re the beautiful people!” Thorn allows her to convince herself that she is psychologically unwell rather than admit that the ideal has failed. The sense of a conglomeration of falsehood sprung from a single, well-intentioned sin is palpable. Thorn’s bringing Damien into his home is the embodiment of the evil that he invites into his own soul with his initial lie; and like the child the Thorns take in, it wears the face of innocence, and grows larger every day.

The mythic journey begins with separation from normal society, marking a sacred space for the spiritual education of the subject. It is prefaced and necessitated by the subject’s emotional or spiritual distance from his society: in Ambassador Thorn’s case the lie told to prevent his wife’s grief brings his integrity into question; the five year old Damien’s fury at his first trip to church reveals that the family are not practising Christians and have not so much as baptised their child, despite the piety in Katherine’s manner when she demands that Damien attend a society wedding. Thorn’s Ambassadorship is a position of trust, yet the morality and family that aided his appointment are illusory. The direction and distance of Thorn’s journey is defined by his deviance. He goes to Italy, his child’s birthplace, his quest a relentless search for the truth he relinquished the day his son was born. It will take him as far as Jerusalem, to Meggido, site of the battle of Armageddon, where Christian truth is prophesied to triumph forever.

Similarly, the personal crisis at the centre of *The Prophecy* is one of faith. Thomas (Elias Koteas), the protagonist, is first shown at his ordination into the Church, which goes awry due to his violent visions. (Doubting) Thomas becomes estranged to his spirituality, claiming that he is shown “too much”. Thomas instead moves towards another institutional form of service to the people: the police. In one sense the police force represents the model of what the Church should be; an active institution requiring the acceptance of a

moral creed and the opposition of evil. Thomas puts his faith in his society, despite the corruption he is presented with in his work. His journey to Chimney Rock is the beginning of a process of reconciliation, a move towards a renewed faith that unites rather than separates the concepts of God and humanity.

Although the Christian concept of time is linear, beginning at the Creation and moving towards the cataclysmic point of the Judgement Day, the recurring pattern in apocalyptic film is to present time as cyclic. Christian eschatology gives a form and moral base to the drama, but the outcome is not that proposed by Revelation, an end to the world and a new, transcendent beginning. In the apocalyptic film genre, the earth is threatened only to lend triumph to its ongoing survival, the films representing the reenactment of a rite of renewal. In the same way as the eternal life promised to the saved in Revelation is a transcendence of death, the evasion of global destruction preserves the life of society, which thus transcends individual mortality. In the previous chapter, society was compared to (a) God in that it demands affiliation, love and sometimes martyrdom in return for the immortality gained through association. The cyclic nature of time in these films, including those with an explicitly Christian framework, places eternity and heaven within the bounds of society, locating within it the means for transcendence of death and the self.

The protagonist's journey is a demonstration of the consequences of sin and the salvation offered by social affiliation and virtue. This structure is aeons old, a folkloric reiteration of social morals and an encouragement to adherence. The format evokes Greek tragedy, which had the explicit social function of reinforcing desirable modes of behaviour through the temporary indulging of their antithesis on sanctioned occasions. It is possible that apocalyptic film performs a similar function. Thorn's predestined role in the apocalyptic drama likens him to the heroes of ancient tragedy, who suffer at

the hands of Fate, allowed to become great only to be destroyed as an example to all. Like Oedipus, who unknowingly killed his father and wed his mother, Thorn commits a seemingly small sin which is in reality a terrible crime, the lie which leads to his harbouring of the Antichrist. The resulting evil becomes a plague, resulting in the deaths of others, and the only cure is self-sacrifice. Thorn appears pre-chosen for his role in the apocalypse, locating him at the exact time and place of the Antichrist's birth. The birthmarks on both Damien and Father Brennan suggest their lack of free will in being evil, conscripted before birth into Satan's army. If this is so, then their culpability for sins is debatable, but Brennan, despite his repentance, has no faith in the mercy of God, saying to Thorn, "You'll see me in Hell". Like Oedipus, Thorn must labour to find the truth, even if knowing equates to destruction. Apocalyptic film functions in a similar way to Greek Tragedy; Peter Taplin states that "tragedy is organised in sequence, a sequence which gives shape and comprehensibility to what we feel."<sup>2</sup> The cause-and-effect structure of tragedy, beginning with a sin that must eventually result in atonement, equates to the generic pattern of apocalyptic film. The protagonists begin as the lapsed, estranged from society and its founding moral principles. They undergo a spiritual trial, which is in effect a call to defend their society from a threat, whether physical or supernatural. The culmination of the trial is in a subject's willingness to demonstrate affiliation or love for the society, the ultimate expression of which is the sacrifice of the subject's own interests in favour of the group. The reward for such an action is being part of something greater than the self, going beyond, not being alone. The transcendence of the self that is the goal of the spiritual journey is attained via the link to the greater whole, the genetic immortality that society promises.

Classical tragedy compares to Christian apocalyptic film in another sense: when first performed, the tragedy of Oedipus and others was made meaningful by the audience's belief in the history of the man himself and the

existence of the gods that engineered the crisis. The pity felt for Oedipus was reinforced by real fear of incurring the same fate; this pity/fear dialectic was Plato's equation for catharsis, the purging of antisocial emotions by collective indulgence in them, which he believed to be the social function of tragedy (a similar idea to the officially sanctioned carnivals of medieval Europe, which released for a brief period the populace from rigorous Church law, a placebo to inhibit feelings of rebellion). When performed today, the Classical gods inspire no such fear, as they have been reduced to fictional characters by their encounter with modern belief systems. The plays become fairytales, and the gods merely childhood ogres. The Christian apocalyptic film walks the line between apocrypha and myth. In one sense they appeal to a Judeo-Christian society as a kind of spiritual heritage, making use of the structures of religion to reinforce the influence of society's mores and values. In this capacity there is potential for adding new parables (such as those of *The Omen* and *The Prophecy*) to the collection, building on the pre-existing Christian tradition further lessons on life and vindications of society. However, the waning influence of Christianity on society makes these stories less about God and more about the society that claims him. They possibly do little more than waken a dormant sense of guilt in their audience, a nervousness that the Christianity (or at least certain forms of it) they have left behind is, after all, going to visit retribution on a lapsed world. For those without such guilt it becomes a 'what-if' scenario, like the Cold War fear of *Planet of the Apes*. In the context of the apocalypse, God is only ever shown in a vengeful or ineffectual aspect, never present in life, but waiting in the shadows for humanity to step out of line. In this respect, the films play on a fear of the absent, demonic punisher, the brutal father whose return home is a threat to bad children, or the lurking bogeyman. If this is the case, the Christian apocalyptic and God, like the gods of ancient tragedy, become no more than a

mythical threat, invoking enough remembered fear to provide a thrill, and little else.

Conversely, the structures of genre film vindicate and reinforce expectations, such as what constitutes 'normality,' the consequences of evil and the closure (or non-closure that indicates a coming sequel) of an ending. In this sense they encourage the perpetuation of the status quo; in normalising the moral and narrative structures presented within, they advocate adherence to societal values. In this sense, they possibly do encourage the pity/fear dialectic, reinforcing the benefits of societal affiliation. The location of deviance and the corrupted state of culture at the outset of the films is an indicator of this. In the films previously examined, depictions of home and family were central indicators of societal corruption and decay. In both *The Omen* and *The Prophecy*, it is visions of the official Church, especially the physical building, that reveal the spiritual conditions of the diegetic world. The condition of the Church, which can be seen as a community's binding spiritual home and family, illustrates the moral and philosophical decline within the society. In *The Omen* churches are alien spaces. For Father Brennan, who rejects his satanic past to warn Ambassador Thorn of Damien's identity, the asylum of church is withheld. Trying to escape a storm of supernatural anger, Brennan wrenches at the locked doors and windows of a church. The locked church suggests that God's grace is denied him, despite his demonstrated repentance; he is struck and killed by a metal rod, sliced from the church roof by lightning, indicating that the sacred ground of the surrounding cemetery is no protection against evil, and the church itself is the agent of death rather than salvation. As previously indicated, Thorn and his family do not appear to attend church; the only church actually entered by Thorn is in the final scenes, where the ritualistic slaying of Damien is to take place. The Christian church in *The Omen* appears to be a dead religion, inactive and irrelevant, something done for show, as in the case of the society

wedding. The priests are the most corrupt, with both Brennan and the priest from the hospital agents of Satan. The social crisis is embodied in a lack or negligence of spirituality; the apocalypse occurs in response to this, visiting a God of vengeance on an unbelieving world.

The Christian church in *The Prophecy* is similarly defunct, decayed beneath a bright surface. It is one of extreme ceremony, cultivating exclusivity in the rigid formality of its rituals. There is an implicit criticism of the Church both in the decadent opulence of the ordination ceremony and the truth of Thomas's visions; the stillness and beauty of the cathedral in the opening scenes makes a cold contrast to Thomas's horrific visions of the angel war, images of which are interspliced with his ordination. The passion with which the angels fight for the will of God is missing from the pious clergy; the church rejects the similarly passionate, spiritually gifted Thomas, indicating an overt repression and control, a church emptied of saints and mystics. Thomas learns later that God is not speaking to anyone, allowing the angel war its own resolution, which casts doubt on the faith of the other priests being ordained with Thomas; it is a dead religion, as God neither calls or answers those who serve him. Thomas is the only one to see the angel war, and thus the only one appraised of the truth, yet this disqualifies him from his place in the Church. The fighting among the angels, the result of jealousy, is a parallel to the factioned Christian church on earth, with the implication that God has given up trying to speak over the arguing. The only other church Thomas enters is in the town of Chimney Rock, and it is unattended, an empty hall; Thomas goes in to pray, but has another bloody vision of the angel war, and is visited by the angel Gabriel (Christopher Walken), who comments cynically on the strange occurrence of church attendance on a weeknight.

The Native American religions in the latter part of the film reflect a sense of inclusive worship, the acceptance of all forms of spirituality rather than the closed, precise orthodoxy of the official churches. The

community-based religion of the Native Americans highlights the deficiencies of Christian officialdom, as its vitality is evident in its shared social function. The closest thing to a church or communion in the true sense is the hilltop exorcism and confrontation with Gabriel in which the Christians and Native Americans join forces to reject evil.

The image vocabulary of Revelation is employed in both films to add weight to the apocalyptic scenarios. *The Omen*, which explicitly makes use of Revelation as source material, is a set piece of biblical interpretation, adapting the best-known elements of the myth to contemporary events. The events of the film are given a sense of predestination, as the lives of the characters begin to follow ancient prophecy. Thorn himself is singled out for the satanic adoption because of his political status. Jennings, the photographer who becomes involved in Thorn's quest, has a translation of Revelation which says of the Beast, "He shall rise from the eternal sea". He continues: "And theologians have already interpreted the eternal sea as meaning the world of politics: the sea that constantly rages with turmoil and revolution...so the devil's child will rise from the world of politics."<sup>3</sup> This interpretation follows the doctrine that earthly power is the domain of Satan, God's kingdom being Heaven. The Antichrist must eventually rise to power over the world, and so politics is an efficient way to begin. Thorn's convenient position would, however, be useless to the satanic cause but for his choice to lie.

The most popularly known of the symbols of Revelation is the 'Number of the Beast', 666. In *The Omen* it manifests as both Damien's birthday (6 AM, July 6th), and a birthmark under his hair; it is explained as representing the "unholy trinity". In Christian tradition, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are unified in the Trinity, separate entities making up a complete, singular God. They have a parallel in Revelation as the Dragon (Satan), the Beast (Antichrist) and the False Prophet. The relationship between the two trinities may have given rise to the popular interpretation that the Antichrist is the

literal son of the devil, a motif which is used throughout Christian centred apocalyptic film. The apocalyptic trilogy is completed by the priest at the hospital, whose temptation of Thorn equates him to the False Prophet.

Revelation states that 666 is the number of a man, alluding to a numeric code (the number-value of the words 'Caesar Nero', persecutor of the early Christians, adds to 666); it has also been linked to the holy number 7, which represents the perfection of God, 6 being thus incomplete, a symbol of the evil that is the absence of God. It refers to the brand that followers of the beast wear on their skin in the days before apocalypse, and in *The Omen* it is used as a means of surety, finally convincing Thorn that his child is evil. Once Thorn begins to entertain the possibility that his adopted child is in fact the Antichrist, his world becomes separate from normal life and time, his travel to Italy making him even physically distant from his customary surroundings. In the interceding transitional stage, his spiritual trial is played out through his confrontation of an inverted, antistructural world. This world is populated with spirits and demons, hounds of hell, deaths and curses. Thorn's test is essentially a call to play Christ in the deciding battle between good and evil; the Armageddon battle is for his soul, and he must defend it alone against all the forces of darkness.

In developing the saga of Revelation into a fantasy of angel war, *The Prophecy* similarly utilises many aspects of the apocalyptic framework. The winning of the war resides in the possession of a dark soul, that of Colonel Hawthorne, an army officer who brutally slaughtered enemy soldiers in the Korean war, and was court martialled amid accusations of human sacrifice. The film evidence from his court martial shows his victims in mass graves, or impaled on trees and poles, an earthly reflection of the visions Thomas has of the angel war, linking the two battles. Colonel Hawthorne is the representation of War, the horseman of the apocalypse, part of the tribulation loosed on mankind in the final days. In an echo of Christ's nativity, this soul



on whom the earth's fate hinges is implanted by an angel in a virgin named Mary, when Simon (Eric Stoltz) hides his prize in a young girl. She and her friends play hide-and-seek, an innocent parallel to the angel's hide-and-seek with Colonel Hawthorne's soul. Another horseman, Famine, is manifest in Chimney Rock, Mary's home town. The former copper mining community is almost deserted, the landscape barren and dry, stripped bare of its resources. Those who remain occupy a setting almost post-apocalyptic in aspect, an isolated remnant of a society in an inhospitable, dusty environment, reminiscent of the wastelands of *Mad Max* and *Twelve Monkeys*. This atmosphere is fitting to the film's premise, that the angel war occurs in fulfilment of the 23rd chapter of Revelation. While the chronology is not made clear, it would seem that the events of the 23rd chapter should follow the other twenty two, meaning the apocalypse has in some sense already occurred; however, the angel war is also a parallel and actualisation of the Armageddon battle, fought between the powers of good and evil for the fate of the world.

Chimney Rock is a ghost town in more than one sense. David Bromley states that "in the movement of the Apocalypse the [phenomenal and transcendent] domains are reduced to one,"<sup>4</sup> meaning that the imminence of apocalypse destabilises the normal barriers and definitions; in the transitional space between states, elements of both intermingle, blurring the boundaries. In the case of the apocalypse, it is the line between the natural and supernatural, life and death. In *The Prophecy*, this manifests as the presence of angels, demons and disembodied souls on earth. The start of Thomas's journey is marked by his discovery of a dead angel, Uziel, whom the autopsy reveals to be an embodied synthesis of opposites. It is both male and female, and although an adult has the physical composition of a foetus, linking youth and age, life and death, the potentiality of an infant with inert, static maturity. This angel is the perfect signifier of the antistructure of the liminal phase. It

is thus transcendent of sexuality, age, human senses (it has no physical eyes, yet while alive could see); however its death reveals that, although a supernatural being, it cannot transcend all things. The mortality of the angels adds poignancy to their war; the cabalist writings that Thomas uses to identify Uziel suggest that there are a finite number of angels, and that they do not reproduce. They do not have souls that transcend physical death, as they are the incarnation of soul. The angels are in the unique position of knowing that their death is final.

*The Omen* has a pessimistic end common to the horror genre, culminating in Thorn's death and Damien's survival. The sense of an ongoing threat left unresolved by the film adds to its impact, as well as paving the way for sequels. In the case of the *Omen* trilogy, Damien's rise to power ends in the third film, with Christ as the *deus ex machina*, finally fulfilling his apocalyptic role as vanquisher of Satan. In the first film, however, there is no triumphant Christ, and his absence creates a problematic situation for Thorn. It is almost a constant in Christian apocalyptic films that while manifestations of and belief in an incarnate devil is common, Christ is notoriously reluctant to appear. It is left to the human protagonists to defend the world against evil. The protagonists in one sense must embody Christ, their fight against evil relying on what good they have in their own souls rather than divine intervention. Success in the spiritual trial must be attested to by some action, and so the physical confrontation with evil, the demonstration of opposition, serves as evidence of the subjects' success, allowing them to pass into a new or renewed phase of existence. Thorn at the outset is ambitious, seeking power in appearances, wealth, and politics. His attempting to kill Damien is an active choice of society over himself, as he tries to carry out the ritual murder that will end the threat of apocalypse even after he sees the police guns. It is possible, however, that Thorn's actions are not based in altruism, but in grief and revenge, as he does not decide to kill Damien until after his

wife Katherine dies at the hands of Mrs Baylock, the satanic nanny. He says to Jennings, "Katherine is dead. I want Damien to die too." If Thorn's motives are based in selfish anger, then his actions are not the sacrifice that is needed to avert the apocalypse, and he has failed, a scenario that fits with Damien's ongoing rise to power. However, there is some evidence to suggest that Thorn acts with more than himself in mind. He first takes careful inventory of the evidence against Damien: the birthmark, the grave of his own murdered son, the evil nanny. He follows Buchenhagen's instructions for the ritual killing, and it is the time taken in observing these directions that result in his death. For Thorn, the final test of his conviction is a parallel of the sacrifice of Abraham<sup>5</sup>. Thorn is asked to kill Damien, but is shot before he can go through with it. Within the Christian context of the film, this death preserves Thorn from the sin of killing Damien; Thorn's death is not necessarily a tragedy or failure, but a salvation. When the gun is fired, Thorn is not shown to be shot, or dead, but is enveloped in a flash of white, signifying his transcendence into a new, eternal life.

Like *The Omen*, the resolution of *The Prophecy* lies in the protagonist's return to faith through his confrontation with absolute evil. While Satan is present in the film, it is the angel of death, Gabriel, who represents the Antichrist. Gabriel is the instigator of the war, angry at the love God has for humans. His tragedy is that he does God's will without understanding why, and has come to believe almost that there is no reason. His uncertainty is revealed when he fights Thomas and Katherine, the Chimney Rock schoolteacher, for Mary, saying: "I killed first born sons while their mothers watched, I turned cities into salt, and sometimes when I feel like it I rip the souls from little girls, and from now until kingdom come, the only thing you can count on in your existence is never understanding why." Gabriel's inability to justify these acts to himself and others is his evil. What Thomas comes to realise, which is the saving of his own soul, is that the justification is

love for God, the faith that individual acts are part of a wider plan whose ends are ultimately good. Gabriel becomes not only Antichrist, but false prophet, believing himself to be in the right, when in fact, as Lucifer (ironically) informs him, his war is arrogance, and therefore evil. Thomas comes to an understanding of the faith he had lost, through his encounters both with evil and with effective spirituality. The exorcism of the Colonel's soul from Mary takes place at Old Woman View, with her Native American clan. While the presence of angels suggests that the premise relies on asserting the truth of Christian theology, the Native Americans have an effective religion, attuned to the needs of its members. The doctor who sees Mary finds nothing wrong, but Mary's grandmother and the Hand Trembler she calls in make an accurate diagnosis, undermining mainstream western knowledge in the same way that Thomas's ordination is a criticism of hierarchical spiritual authority. Both are found devoid of a holistic spiritual understanding.

Thomas ultimately finds God not in the words or spectacle of his religion but in the people. Freed from the threat of Gabriel's malice, Thomas's sense of humanity is renewed, and with it his understanding of the nature of faith and God. His final voice-over is a celebration of humanity:

And in the end, I think it must be about faith. And if faith is a choice, then it can be lost, for a man, an angel, or the devil himself. And if faith means never completely understanding God's plan, then maybe understanding just a part of it, our part, is what it is to have a soul, and maybe, in the end, that's what being human is after all.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Robbins, T. and Palmer, S. (Eds.) *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*. New York: Routledge 1997 pp. 4 -5

- <sup>2</sup> Taplin, O. *Greek Tragedy in Action*. London: Methuen and Co Ltd, 1978 p.157
- <sup>3</sup> According to Fallon, the great or eternal sea of Revelation does not refer to an institution, or even a literal sea. For the land-dwelling Jews, the sea “was a symbol of chaos, representing the environment over which humans have no control and in which they venture at their own risk.” (Fallon, M. *The Apocalypse*. [Eastwood: Parish Ministry Publications, 1990], p.51). It is the opposite of God, who represents ultimate order.
- <sup>4</sup> Bromley, D. *Constructing Apocalypticism* in Robbins, T. and Palmer, S. (Eds.) *Millennium, Messiahs and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*. New York: Routledge, 1997 p.36
- <sup>5</sup> God asked of Abraham that he sacrifice his son, a request designed to test Abraham’s faith. When Abraham went to comply, God, convinced of his servant’s loyalty, stopped the sacrifice and asked for a lamb instead, allowing the child to live.

## Chapter IV

### Women as Protagonists of Christian

#### Apocalyptic Film:

#### *The Seventh Sign* and *The Rapture*

If the spiritual progress of the male protagonist dominates the narratives of all the films so far examined, what difference does it make to an apocalyptic film if the protagonist is female? This is the question presented by both *The Seventh Sign* (Carl Schultz, 1988) and *The Rapture* (Michael Tolkin, 1991), two films which centre on a woman's experience of the last days. In the previous chapters, the protagonist was compared to a supplicant in a test of faith, prompted by circumstance to find the Christ within himself, to conquer the evil tempting his soul in his internal battle for redemption. In this scenario the field of Armageddon is the self, and the wider context of apocalypse is a reflection and parallel of the protagonist's personal encounter with death. Although a process similar in structure is apparent in those apocalyptic films featuring female protagonists, the surrounding circumstances are substantially different. Evil is not the vanquishing outsider it was in *Independence Day* and *The Arrival*, nor is it the galvanising universal threat of natural disaster of *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact*. Despite the shared Christian context, evil is not even *The Prophecy*'s dark angel or *The Omen*'s changeling child. While the protagonists of these films also fought the Antichrist within, their spiritual paths were guided by the external danger. For Abby (Demi Moore) in *The Seventh Sign* and Sharon (Mimi Rogers) in *The Rapture* the battle is played out almost entirely within the self, a conflict between hope and despair.

Following the generic pattern established by the films previously discussed, the pre-apocalyptic worlds of *The Seventh Sign* and *The Rapture*

are swathed in corruption, a social and spiritual decadence that breeds hopelessness. Abby cannot tolerate watching the news on television, as channel after channel provides images of violence, war and natural disasters. Abby advises her lodger David (Jurgen Prochnow) to “drink the bottled water, it’s better,” suggesting a pollution of purity that is echoed in Abby’s unborn child, threatened by her ‘deficient’ womb. When she goes for help to a Hassidic Rabbi, she starts to shake his hand, not knowing that it is forbidden to touch him; she befouls him by her touch, and he refuses any further contact with her. The corruption which poisons her own child, and which is represented in the world she inhabits, is located within herself, a contamination she can pass on to others. Conversely, the fastidious Rabbi, who ignores the larger problem of apocalypse to preserve his personal sanctity, can be seen as a criticism of the shortcomings of organised religions. The Catholic Church, represented by a panel of cardinals and an absent Pope, willingly believes Father Lucci, who in his role as False Prophet assures them that there is no imminent apocalypse to worry about. Like the military defence in *Independence Day*, the spiritual defence of the Church is negligent; the Pope, in an ironic touch, has tickets to Faust, and so will spend the theological crisis watching the devil at his most glamorous. The Church, caught up in worldly entertainments, mirrors the Church of *The Prophecy*, a self-indulgent spectacle that serves neither God nor the people. It is not only the Church that fails to provide adequate guidance or inspire affiliation. Abby’s husband Russell (Michael Beihn) is a defence lawyer, fighting to rescind a death sentence on a young murderer. Russell’s attempt to gain leniency for his client, who believes the murder he committed was the will of God, criticises the criminal justice system for basing its values on technicalities rather than God’s law, and claiming power over life and death.

*The Rapture* provides a similar depiction of a corrupt world, and a tainted woman at its centre. Sharon’s job as a phone directories operator is the opposite of a fulfilling career: repetitive, identical calls she answers along with a

hundred other impersonal, eminently replaceable drones, erode her sense of self and soul. Outside her job she reacts against this systematic erasing of her individuality. Her private life is an attempt to shatter the mundaneness of her working days, to transgress the boundaries of social propriety and control, as she and a male friend seek out couples with which to 'swing'. This demonstrates Sharon's sense of incompleteness, of her search for that which will fulfil her. Although she looks for it in sexual encounters, these are the seeking out of a pure experience in a decadent world. She rejects one couple because the man is wearing a toupee, and the woman has a nose job; she renounces the artificial pursuit of beauty which is in essence a denial of reality and humanity, like the forced automation of her job. The first group sex tryst takes place in a store that Sharon's partner Vic has access to. The shop is arranged as a showroom for bedroom furniture, a network of tastefully decorated model bedrooms. The instant gratification and momentary satisfaction that substitute for spiritual fulfilment in Sharon are linked with the artificiality of American consumer culture. The stylish bedrooms offer pre-packaged versions of the ideal, representing the constructed conformity of desire, which are, like any fashion, disposable rather than durable. Like Robert Thorn in *The Omen*, his false family a caricature of the American dream, the seeking of perfection in earthly paradigms is shown to be inauthentic and futile, and an indication of a spiritually bereft society.

Between them, the two films paint a bleak picture of contemporary society, in which the spiritual and ideological bases create no sense of fulfilment or purpose in the populace. Abby is a housewife whose ability to live out her role is blighted by a lack of children, a situation worsened by a series of dangerous and traumatic miscarriages. Like Thomas in *The Prophecy*, Abby has previously had a relationship, or at least an acquaintance with God, revealed when she admits to her adviser, the Jewish student Avi (Manny Jacobs) that she read the bible and attended Sunday school "a long time ago". This spiritual



hope has evaporated over the course of her suffering, and the scars on her wrists evidence her despair, the result of a seeming lack of answers from an unsympathetic God and the social displacement of being a childless would-be mother. Sharon too turns to suicide when she fails to woo God with repentance. The scalding showers and scrubbed teeth as she tries to wash away her sin inspire no mercy, and it is not until she is at the peak of her misery, alone with a stolen gun in a cheap hotel, that God favours her with the dream of the pearl. It is indicative of the nature of Sharon's God that he waits until she is thoroughly broken, too weak and hopeless to even pull the trigger, before offering her help.

Like the male protagonists of other apocalyptic films, Abby and Sharon undergo spiritual trials that are a parallel and microcosm of the wider eschatological crisis. In the form of a journey, the process follows the formula set out by Revelation itself, constituting a final battle between good and evil. It is structured as a ritual of growth, a subject experiencing a time and place outside of society and its conventions in order to reach a new understanding and appreciation of membership. The ritual subject is a representative of the problems within society and of everyone's dissatisfaction. Her journey back towards affiliation ensures that the genre supports the status quo, as the primary figure of audience identification finds reasons for adherence. For Abby and Sharon, there is some difficulty in achieving the end of the process, suggesting that for women, fulfilment is problematic at best.

Abby's spiritual and social ambivalence is the catalyst for her trial. Like president Whitmore in *Independence Day*, whose lack of courage in his convictions is challenged and tried by the apocalyptic threat, it is Abby's despair, the antithesis of faith and social alignment, that necessitates the summons. When Abby makes an optimistic application to her potential child's future school, the headmistress questions the space she has left under "religious denomination". Abby explains that she has none, which is itself not so much the problem as the lack of decisiveness the gap displays; as the headmistress

explains, “I just don’t like blanks”. The inference is that God does not like a blank either, and will not allow Abby to remain one, as in Revelation 3:7, in which Laodicea is reprimanded for being lukewarm in its faith. The Armageddon battle within her is between the dark despair that rules her and the hope for herself and society that equates to faith in a merciful God. Reflecting the location of Abby’s ideals of fulfilment, children are prominent throughout the film. In the opening sequence, in which the first of the seven seals is broken, boiling the oceans and killing everything that lives within it, a child is the first to suffer the consequences of God’s wrath, scalded when he picks up one of the dead fish washed up on the beach. The second instance of divine judgement on the earth is in response to a terrorist attack on a school in Israel in which thirty four children were burned to death. The shot of the second seal frozen in the ice which represents God’s retribution is juxtaposed with the scene of Abby’s ultrasound exam, a precursor of the role the child will play in the coming apocalypse. This scene is followed with Abby’s tour of the school she has chosen for her child. Introduced in the context of expectant motherhood, Abby is linked to a parental God who punishes the abusers of his children; unlike Abby, however, God first allows harm to come to his children, whereas the life and soul of her child become increasingly more important to her than her own.

When it comes to the ultimate decision, Abby is offered the choice between life and death, and her decision to trade her own life for her child’s owes more to her desire to be whole, to have her child, than to preserve the world for herself. Abby’s death is not necessarily a passage into triumphant immortality, as her sacrifice involves a transfer of souls: hers is forfeited so that her soulless baby might have one. Therefore, her death in place of her child may in fact be a true death, an eradication rather than a passage into eternal life. In this case, what she is fighting for is the role of women as agents of human immortality on earth. The apocalypse represents the theft from women of the

power to replace death with new life. Bakhtin describes women as “the incarnation of the stratum that degrades and regenerates simultaneously...the undoing of all that is finished, completed, exhausted, the bodily grave of man.”<sup>1</sup> By ‘degrades’ Bakhtin refers to a carnivalesque inversion of status, the lowering of all that maintains a pretence of authority, made ridiculous by the prospect of death; man is mocked by the womb, which can replace him and is thus a symbol of his obsolescence. Abby’s broken womb, like the shattered vessel that features in her dream-vision, is a representation of apocalypse, the end of renewal and procreation. Despite the use of Christian source material, the film does not present an eschatology that celebrates transcendence; instead *The Seventh Sign* idealises earthly survival, and the genetic immortality of the species signified by procreation. After Abby’s first apocalyptic vision of an empty schoolroom, haunted by the ghosts of children never born, she says to her husband “I could feel it coming”. The meaning suggested by her pregnant body is that she is referring to her baby, the beginnings of birth pangs; however, when he asks her what was coming, she replies, “Death.” Through association, Abby’s child becomes synonymous with death, a harbinger of the apocalypse. This child of death at once comments on the feebleness of human creative power compared with that of God, and represents the apocalyptic fate of the mother, replaced in the world by her own act of creation.

While the male protagonists of apocalyptic film can generally be linked to Christ, in that they arise from low beginnings to messianic status, delivering their society into triumphant renewal, the fate of female protagonists is more ambivalent. Abby sacrifices herself, but does so more for the sake of her baby than for the world; Christ is present already in the film, in David Banner, the mysterious lodger who describes himself as a teacher of languages<sup>2</sup>, but as the agent of destruction rather than saviour. While her sacrifice likens her to Christ, she can be compared more closely to Mary, as she carries the deciding child within her. Both women shy away from the dissonance that would result

from rejecting the traditional female roles. In Revelation, the Whore of Babylon, whose evil is signified by her unnaturalness as a woman (“no widow’s weeds for me, no deaths of children”<sup>3</sup>) fares badly. The despair that underpins the spiritual journey stems from a problem with classification. Abby has been pregnant, but is not a mother. She hovers between chastity and motherhood, her pregnancy belying the former but her childlessness negating the latter. The struggle causes similar problems for Sharon. She is no Mary, although she can be compared to Mary Magdalene, both in her move from immorality to following Christ, and in the nature of her relationship with Christ which borders on sexual infatuation. Beginning the film as the proverbial whore, she makes a dramatic shift to chastity after her conversion to Christianity, remaking her virginity in laundered sheets and floral dresses. Her motherhood completes the cycle, only to be disrupted when she loses her husband and later kills her daughter, Mary. Without these indicators of virtue, she begins to dream of sex again. Sharon is certainly not Christ, as she makes no contribution to the apocalypse, and fails her own spiritual trial, at least as far as her God is concerned.

In terms of the issues raised by a female protagonist in an apocalyptic film, *The Rapture* addresses similar problems to *The Seventh Sign*, but more explicitly, and with less pretence at resolution. The essential component of the two films is the difficulty of belief in a cruel world, and it is apparent that the world is particularly unkind to women. There is a double standard operating with regard to the male characters in *The Seventh Sign* and *The Rapture*; their paths through life are easier and their spiritual trials less harsh. Randy, Sharon’s eventual husband, admits to her that he once killed a man for a thousand dollars; he wonders if he would still feel guilty if he had not been told it was wrong to kill. Randy is questioning the essence of morality, implying that society constructs its members’ perceptions of virtue and sin. Randy has no particular faith in Sharon’s God, and only joins her church to be with her; yet

when Sharon is standing outside Heaven, he is already inside. Similarly the policeman who helps Sharon in the desert, himself not Christian, easily reconciles his experience of life with a benevolent God, professes his love and enters Heaven. In both films, the patriarchal social structure is a source of spiritual difficulty for the female protagonist. Both Abby and Sharon are in relatively powerless social positions compared to their husbands. Abby's husband is a defence lawyer, and the influence and sense of utility this job gives him ensures that he will never feel the sense of helplessness and despair experienced by Abby, who perceives her only possible role as that of mother and is betrayed by her own body. Randy's marriage to Sharon, which is an alignment with Christian values and hence the social structure, sees him rise in rank socially, from mechanic to the head of a large firm, while she moves from being an independent, employed woman (albeit in a dead-end job) to a housewife.

The patriarchy of society is not limited to the human sphere. At its head is God himself, and this is the primary source of difficulty for women. In place of an actual Antichrist, God manifests an evil presence in both films. In both films his salvation programme is exclusive; it is unclear whether any people are to survive *The Seventh Sign's* apocalypse, and in *The Rapture* he pre-selects and harshly rules the saved only to renege and offer salvation to apparently all males and any female sycophant. He abandons Sharon in the desert, and plans to destroy Abby's world in punishment for human error. Abby says, "We were told he was a God of love", but in *The Seventh Sign* Christ, present on earth as the executor of God's wrath, says, "God's grace is empty". Father Lucci, the most apparently evil figure, is a false prophet, but he has little influence over the events of the apocalypse and seeks it only in order to die himself. In one sense, Abby's baby is the closest thing to Antichrist, a soulless harbinger of apocalypse. In another reading, it is her own despair that threatens the world, the same misery that Father Lucci also sought to end with its destruction.

The vengeful God that cursed Lucci has no steadfastness in the lives of either Sharon or Abby, and instead adds to their despair. The test of faith that Sharon undergoes in *The Rapture* is encapsulated in the phrase, “Don’t ask God to meet you halfway,” which is the advice of the boy-prophet she accepts as a spiritual guide, reiterated by Mary when she speaks to Sharon from a dream state. Sharon does not understand the implications of the instruction: that unlike Ambassador Thorn, who had the surety of a birthmark to justify his attempt on Damien’s life, her faith must surpass all need for proof, all desire for justification. Unfortunately for Sharon, the fundamentalist nature of the cult she joins offers no help to the supplicant in need of reassurance; it is total adherence or nothing. The question asked by Avi of the Catholic priest in *The Seventh Sign* as to which of the many religions is right, is answered in *The Rapture*: if they don’t worship Christ then “none of them are saved”. The chosen few share a dream of God, depicted as a pearl, and Sharon’s exclusion from salvation is assured until she has the dream. In response to the fear this creates in her, she looks, not for God, but for the faults in herself that are responsible for her damnation. Thus, instead of mounting a battle in the physical world against an incarnation of evil, the devil she rejects in the first instance is herself. Her journey eventuates in the realisation that the devil is not in her; he is in Heaven, judging her soul.

In a sense, the apocalypse can be seen as a metaphor for a female protest against the oppressive patriarchal regime. The social position of women is exposed and criticised through depictions of their role in the apocalyptic drama, leaving us with a choice between Abby, the dead victim, a human sacrifice to male dominance, and Sharon, who after a lifetime of subjugation stands on her principles and is eternally cast out. Women are oppressed by masculinist spirituality to the point that not only their souls but their bodies belong to God. Abby is not allowed to give birth to live children; she is destined to be mother to a soulless baby, so God orchestrates the barrenness of her womb. Sharon is

lifted bodily from earth during the apocalypse, even though she protests. There is nothing these women possess that is not at the mercy of a ruthless God.

The apocalypse is the crisis point of this social conflict, and its resolution is difficult; Abby's hope, which equates to submission to the patriarchy, is a death, both physically and of her visibility as a symptom of social discord. There is no solution to Sharon's dispute; her damnation is perhaps a braver and more honest sacrifice than Abby's life and soul. In treating the problem of the female protagonist, *The Seventh Sign* and *The Rapture* in part encompass a critique of the traditionally male-centred apocalyptic film. The male protagonists' comparisons with Christ equate to a masculinist conception of theology, in which the male is the centre of messianic destiny.<sup>4</sup> Abby and Sharon by their very presence contest the expectation of a male hero, and thus dispute this patriarchal version of spirituality, revealing the iniquity of its motifs and the social inequality it perpetuates.

Abby and Sharon are distanced from their culture through ideological conflicts and dissatisfaction, but their trials take place outside of official order; the spiritual journey begins in earnest with a separation from society. When Abby begins to interpret world events and the movements of her boarder as apocalyptic signs, Russell fears for her sanity. The doctor presiding over Abby's pregnancy agrees that her physical disorder may have sparked mental hysteria, and a nurse is assigned to watch over her. Abby is correct about the signs, but she is treated as insane. Released thus from the conventions of her traditional role, she undergoes her spiritual trial on bizarre ground; she enters a world of visions and prophecy, in which death and eternity interlace, and relationships lose definition. Her search for spirituality runs almost contrary to the flow of society: looking for a bible, the young Avi and heavily pregnant Abby book a motel room, to the amused leer of the receptionist, quick to assume deviance in a cynical, corrupt world. Sharon's trial begins with a similar distancing from her old way of life. She rejects Vic and others who

represent her former lasciviousness; she changes her appearance, her manner and way of speaking. Like Abby, her new-found spirituality is at odds with her society. It interferes with her job when she begins evangelising over the phone, and like Abby's struggle to save Jimmy, it does not understand the slaying of a child to send her to God. However, the despair that ends with Sharon's conversion in the lonely motel room is only the preface to the real trial. It is a physical separation, the trip to the desert, that marks the true beginning of her journey.

Schmithals states that one of the most important formal characteristics of apocalyptic writing is that "revelations are imparted to their recipients by means of visions,"<sup>5</sup> a motif displayed not only in the vision of St John in Revelation, but also in *The Seventh Sign* and *The Rapture*. In both cases, the dream indicates the protagonist's passage into the transitional stage of the ritual process, as, separated from their traditional spiritual state, they begin their trial in earnest. Abby is already in a liminal state, a pregnant pre-mother, neither fully one nor the other. The apocalyptic world is similarly destabilised by a temporary lack of specification, halfway between life and death. As well as the structures of the world, time is upset; Abby is at once aware of her current life and of its being a repetition of an earlier trial which she failed. She has a recurring dream, beginning with an empty classroom that becomes a dark hall; the hall becomes a room and the scene is biblical, a robed man being beaten by a Roman centurion before a laughing crowd. The centurion demands of Abby, "Will you die for him?" Abby, who is herself robed and veiled, shakes her head in confusion, dropping the clay pot she holds. In one sense it seems Abby has been reincarnated, as David tells her, "you were there", suggesting that Abby had the power to save Christ from crucifixion by offering herself in his place; it is a pre-echo of the choice Abby will have to make for her baby, which parallels the child to Christ. The dream is a metaphor for Abby's current spiritual crisis, the confusion and hopelessness evidenced by the scars on her wrists. The clay



vessel<sup>6</sup> signifies Abby's barrenness, a broken womb unable to hold a child to term. It is a punishment for the failure depicted in the dream, her inability to surmount fear that sees her choose herself over Christ.

Sharon's recurring dream is of the pearl that represents God.<sup>7</sup> Before her first dream, Sharon says to Randy, her partner and later husband, "There's a spiritual need, just as real as hunger, just as real as the need for love", which indicates in her a tendency to consider the spiritual as something outside of love; she equates love with sex, and thus looks for something different in a relationship with God. This explains her willingness to accept a pearl as representative of God, perfect, complete and beautiful, but hard and inhuman. It is an object of awe and wonder, but not of love; there can be no sympathy for the human condition from a pearl, and it is not a God with whom one has a personal relationship. Although Sharon speaks of meeting Christ, it is meant metaphorically; she describes him as "The Lord Jesus Christ, your God and Saviour", an impersonal and official title reflecting not empirical love but rather the smug demonstration of her inclusion amongst the saved. In order to be virtuous, she becomes in a sense sexually involved with her God who comes to her at night, which is reflective of both her empirical understanding of love and of herself and what she has to offer.

Conversely, Abby has no relationship with her God, romantic or otherwise. The fear she develops toward David, believing he has designs on her child, is not misplaced, as it is God's plan to allow the baby to be born dead. Her trial is a process of finding hope, which in the film is equated with faith. Her suicide attempts, which indicate a disappointment with life and a lack of optimism for the future, are at odds with her fervent desire to bring a child into the world. The apocalypse in one sense represents a chance for Abby to clarify her reasons for wanting to create human life despite her own anguish; she will not be allowed to produce a child until she has reconciled these conflicting emotions and become submissive to the omnipotent patriarchy. Her success in

the trial, and the subsequent renewal of humanity's future, is analogous to her role as a mother in the life-cycle, one generation's death a necessary prelude to new life. In her dream-vision, at the end of the film interspersed with her labour, Christ's role as giver of new life to society is paralleled with Abby's creative maternal power. Her death is juxtaposed with an earthquake, like Christ's death on the cross. David tells Avi, "Remember it all. Write it down. Tell it. So people will use the chance she's given them," which links Abby's sacrifice to the biblical tradition, adding her to the apocrypha. However, Abby's sacrifice is not necessarily the joyous triumph of the Christ figure. What she gives up is not merely her life, but her soul, which is given to her baby. The loss of Abby's soul so that her child can have life on earth signifies a problem with the idea of transcendence. David, as risen Christ, only comes to the faithful before death; he appears to Jimmy and reveals himself to Abby, but there is no depiction of their souls joining him once they die. Abby's sacrifice sees her pass into oblivion rather than to heaven; she cannot bear her baby's death because it is final, unlike Sharon, who even at the pinnacle of doubt and fear can send her child to heaven with a bullet. Christ's crucifixion was merely the prelude to his resurrection; Abby is an absolute martyr, dispossessed of her self.

Sharon's test is a literal parallel to Christ's temptation in the desert, as well as fulfilling Revelation 12:6, in which the woman flees from the Dragon into the desert. The desert is also, more ominously, traditionally an abode of evil spirits, into which scapegoats, animal sacrifices bearing the sins of a community, were sent to die.<sup>8</sup> The relationship between Sharon and the God of *The Rapture*, like a destructive human relationship, begins as a sexual infatuation bordering on addiction, and ends in a struggle for power. Sharon watches men enter heaven without trial, including Randy and the policeman who befriends her in the desert; yet she, who sought God and killed her own daughter for her faith in him, is denied heaven. Unlike Ambassador Thorn,

who like the biblical Abraham is spared the actuality of killing his child, Sharon is allowed to sacrifice her daughter on a desert hilltop.

She is given no explanation or reward for her suffering, and in the end the trial comes down to words. After going to extremes of both faith and of despair, she hovers between, needing an answer or justification that would compensate the trials she has undergone. Stopped for speeding after shooting Mary, Sharon stands in darkness, with the blue and red lights from the police car flashing on her. She is on the absolute cusp of decision, confused, pulled equally by the blue light of heaven and the red of hell. She says, "You have to love him, no matter what. But I don't love him. Not anymore. He has too many rules", and in this film, no rationalisation for them. The last scene, set outside heaven, not in hell but in the Old Testament equivalent, Sheol, the place of dust and darkness, is the last stage of a war over Sharon's soul. Mary urges her to "tell God you love him", but Sharon's love has evaporated over the course of her trials, and she has no intention of entering heaven as a hypocrite. In these final moments, Sharon, who has spent the film searching for herself in vain, finds at last strength and integrity in refusing the conditional love of a selfish God.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin, M (trans. Iswolsky, H.) *Rabelais and his World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1984 p.240

<sup>2</sup> Christ was born of the line of David, and was called Rabbi (teacher) by his followers.

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 18:7

<sup>4</sup> This will be demonstrated more fully in Chapter 5, in the contrast between *The 5th Element*'s female messiah and her dominant male helper.

<sup>5</sup> Schmithals, W. (trans. Steely, J.) *The Apocalyptic Movement: Introduction and Interpretation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975

<sup>6</sup> It also refers to Rev 2:27 “and shatter [unfaithful nations] like so many pots”

<sup>7</sup> Like the clay pot in *The Seventh Sign*, the pearl is also a reference to Revelation: 2:17 describes a white stone that is a badge of membership for the saved. It also refers to the “pearl of great price” in Matthew 13.

<sup>8</sup> See Leviticus 16:20-22

## Chapter V

### Male Restorationism in Christian

#### Apocalyptic Film:

#### *The 5th Element* and *End Of Days*

*The 5th Element* (Luc Besson, 1997) and *End Of Days* (Peter Hyams, 1999) in many ways represent the fulfilment of the apocalyptic film genre's potential. Both take elements of the genre to new levels in terms of their opportunistic use of both the generic heritage and present events. *The 5th Element* takes the source text of Revelation and develops it within a science fiction context, conflating many of the subgenres of apocalyptic film. The context is literally universal, encompassing not merely the world but other civilisations. There are aliens both good and evil, the former to warn humanity against error, the latter to provide a dehumanised threat; the ultimate evil is a 'dark planet', at once Satan and the asteroid of *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact*. *End Of Days* is the heir to *The Omen*'s legacy, an explicit rendering of the present as an interpretation of biblical prophecy. The turn of the millennium provides a framework that lends new relevance and immediacy to the apocalyptic drama. Frank Kermode states:

In our culture, the Jewish-Christian apocalypses have been, as they remain, the principle means by which investigators map the past and predict the future as it may be discerned from their own temporal situation, which is always, of course, assumed to be a turning point of history; otherwise, it wouldn't be worth bothering about.<sup>1</sup>

The effect of this is a causal link between past and future. Like all the films in this study, both *End Of Days* and *The 5th Element* present a spiritual and

social assessment of current life and times; *The 5th Element* explicitly looks forward to a future society that, while ostensibly positive, carries some implicit criticisms of the present, while *End Of Days* displays a world populated by Satanists and deviants, an image of corruption that is the culmination of past laxity and moral decay.

Both films present signs of impending apocalypse deriving from Revelation. In *The 5th Element*, the apocalyptic Horsemen are represented: the messianic supreme being Leeloo (Milla Jovovich) looks up War in a digital encyclopaedia after being shot in her first violent battle; the traumatic discovery of human evil shocks her into a despair that almost destroys the earth. In the opening sequence, set three hundred years before the apocalyptic crisis, the First World War necessitates the relocation of the four elemental stones. The context of war at once heralds the apocalypse and identifies the threat of the evil planet as vastly beyond the negative potential of humans. In *End Of Days*, an earthquake precedes the rise of Satan; the apocalypse is prophesied by a comet, called the "Eye of God" by the priests at the Vatican, a reference to the falling star of Revelation 8:11. There are several references to Revelation 20:7, "When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison", which is the premise for the film. At the end, the devil is sent back to Hell in a wave of fire, his fate also in Revelation 20:9-10. In Thomas Aquinas's subterranean cell, which resembles that of Father Brennan in *The Omen* in that it is plastered with biblical quotations and crucifixes, 'Woman of Babylon' is written on the refrigerator, linking New York to the decadent city of Babylon. A photograph of Christine York, the girl prophesied to be the mother of the Antichrist, is in the refrigerator, but she is not yet the Whore Satan intends her to be. The apocalyptic threat is embodied in the corruption of innocence, the turning of a virgin into a whore, Mary to Babylon.

The apocalypse is a point of crisis, a moment at which all the corruption and decadence of the earth becomes concentrated, and its climax is a death.

Whether this death is permanent or the precursor to a rebirth depends on the amount of virtue present to fight it; in effect society must find a saviour willing to sacrifice him/herself for its survival, thereby locating the Christ within itself. Consequently, that messianic figure must also confront evil and temptation to find the Christ within. The film's position as moral folklore rests on its definitions of evil and virtue; the apocalyptic context, which necessarily encompasses death and eternity, constitutes a large part of what gives meaning to the moral judgements. The worlds of *The 5th Element* and *End Of Days* display the hallmarks of decadence, identifying the nature of the evil the saviour will confront.

*The 5th Element* sketches a future landscape, signifying that humanity has lasted through the next three hundred years without succumbing to war or environmental damage. On the surface, it is an almost utopic world of colourful technology and political correctness, but with undertones of dissonance and insincerity. There is a world government, long idealised as an end to territorial disputes, with a presumably elected president; however, the ruling of earth by a single human is reminiscent of the Antichrist's predicted domination in the last days, and it is an exclusively Anglo-American government, based in New York City. There is a seeming synthesis of spirituality with the more prosaic responsibilities of command, signified by the presence of, among others, a rabbi and cardinal in the president's headquarters. However, this apparent union is subverted by the president's response to Vido Cornelius (Ian Holm), a priest of the Mondochiwan religion, who recognises the precursors of apocalypse. At first dismissing Cornelius's advice, the president then decides that there is no need for the priest to be involved in what is, in effect, the vindication and triumph of his faith, as well as his area of expertise. The government is thus shown to be hypocritical in its concessions to spirituality, believing more in its own militaristic methods of control. This control extends to the proletariat; during police raids, citizens

must place their hands in yellow circles, ever present on the walls of their apartments. Each person carries a 'Multipass', a universal identification card that suggests an Orwellian level of surveillance. Crime is nonetheless common; Korban Dallas (Bruce Willis), an ex-army major who now drives a taxi, has a collection of guns taken from outwitted thieves. Korban's taxi is unregistered due to licence points lost in accidents, and the police, pursuing his mysterious passenger, are thus allowed to shoot to kill. Korban escapes into the thick smog that has forced humanity to live in almost literal skyscrapers, revealing that the glistening city has its foundations in squalor, a poisoned earth suggesting the presence of Pestilence, the apocalyptic Horseman. The dissatisfaction of the populace is apparent in the refuse workers' strike at the spaceport, which has left huge piles of rubbish in the terminal. This malcontent is clarified by the offhand firing of a million employees, including Korban, of Zorg Industries, who receive no notice or redundancy payment, indicating that there are no laws protecting workers. These negative images are slipped subtly into the bright, clean world of *The 5th Element*, subverting the efficacy of the official institutions.

*End Of Days* is also set in New York and establishes a similar dichotomy between the appearance of order and an underlying bleakness. There is a constant juxtaposition of opposites, drawing contrasts between states of being. In the scene showing the Antichrist's rise from hell, there is a strong contrast between the privileged and the working class, represented by sewer workers still busy late at night in the holiday season, while the wealthy are dining at expensive restaurants. Throughout the film there is a split focus between New York's Y2K preparations, which are an essentially positive celebration of life, and the satanic mass which is its negation. Much of the drama takes place either on rooftops or underground, creating a sense of space on the margins of daily life, invisible yet ever present, populated by demons and saints. Dark, wet streets and the winter setting create a *film-noir*



atmosphere that suggests decay and contamination, a rising of bile beneath the veneer of order.

In his discussion of action films, Fred Pfeil states that contrasts of landscapes, between the ‘polished facade’<sup>2</sup> and the visceral underbelly mark the twofold nature of the protagonist’s process. In *The 5th Element* the shuttle ship that takes Korban and Leeloo to Phlostion Paradise has vermin in its undercarriage; the gloss of the identical stewardesses and the clinical interior of the shuttle is undermined by the laxity of the ground crew, who share a joint and hose out the little beasts in its undercarriage. The priest helping Leeloo, Vido Cornelius, stows away in the ship’s airducts, and when discovered hangs tangled in the veinous wires of the ship. In *End Of Days* disused subway tunnels house a den of vice under the city. The devil rises through a manhole, from the sewer, like a product of the city’s bowels, a result of the corruption festering beneath the polished facade. Conversely, the real vitality of the Church also lies underground. The basement of St John’s is home to secret theological research, like a Resistance movement, staffed with decoders and victims seeking asylum. Before his death, the Vatican’s emissary Thomas Aquinas<sup>3</sup> also lived beneath the streets, indicating that the underbelly need not be evil in itself; it is rather the pretence of virtue and order that allows the growth of hidden cankers.

Pfeil considers that “the site of the state...is weakened by both its *domestication* and by the subversion of *patriarchal male authority* that contemporary domestication brings in its wake.”<sup>4</sup> He suggests that the action film (of which the apocalyptic film is often a subgenre) embodies the acting out of rituals of male dominance, promoting, celebrating, even reinstating male power, and that they evoke concepts of destiny aimed at working class white male dreams of supremacy. It is true that in apocalyptic film the decadence of society that precedes the apocalypse is coded as a lack of virility, and thus could be seen as a result of the emasculation of male phallic power enacted by

the rise of feminism or overbearing societal regulation. In the case of Harry, in *Armageddon*, as well as Korban Dallas in *The 5th Element* and *End Of Days*' Jericho Cane (Arnold Schwarzenegger), their initial lack of domestication singles them out as potential heroes, as they are seen to have excesses of physical potency not present in men more bound to the official sphere (alignment with society being in part a compromise of wild instincts). Their rampant phallic power, vindicated by their role in the crisis, ensures that their domestication at the end of the films is more a post-coital glow than a capitulation to the social order, a softness that follows a conquering. This glorifies the inherent destiny of the male, who is represented as a repository of potentially redemptive phallic energy. Conversely, however, the reading of unchecked male virility as triumphant is in part undermined by the undomesticated protagonists in despair at their lives, so that the consequent quest is towards the recovery of domesticity lost. The male is at once deified and encouraged to submit to social control until such a time of destiny should arise; it is essentially a dream of wish-fulfilment, the films offering a vicarious experience of individual male significance, soothing the desire to rebel. The films essentially support the status quo and its idealised, fundamental centre of society, the heterosexual couple and the nuclear family; in Christian apocalyptic film the achievement of these ideals is equated to salvation.

Pfeil states that there are "two convergent yet distinct problems per film, one private or personal and the other public, even international, and their resolution [is achieved] through the violent action of a white male protagonist."<sup>5</sup> The apocalypse is omni-national, even, in *The 5th Element*, interplanetary. *The 5th Element* and *End Of Days* follow this model, vindicating male physical power as a force for good. The white male protagonists reflect the influence of social and moral decay on the general population. Korban Dallas was, in his youth, a major in the special forces, Jericho Cane in *End Of Days* was an NYPD police officer: both government

institutions, dedicated to defending the autonomy and laws of society, indicating that at least at one point in their lives they felt an allegiance to the community. Both jobs demand active strength and physical aggression suited to Korban and Jericho's well-muscled physiques, and channel their phallic power into service to society. However, their service went unrewarded; the governments that employed them, reluctant to acknowledge the social conflicts agencies like the police and army exist to control, prefer to forget threats to their ideological and territorial dominance and thus forget the men whose job it was to defend society from them. Because of this denial, both suffered instead of gained. Both lost their families as a direct result of their work: Korban was unwillingly divorced after his wife left while he was on a mission, and Jericho's wife and daughter were murdered by criminals he was testifying against. Partly as a result of this family breakdown, both men abandoned their roles as defenders and became involved in the more individualistic private sector, Korban as a taxi driver, Jericho as a security guard. The disillusionment towards society experienced by the protagonists reflected the spiritual and philosophical crisis embodied in the apocalypse. The decadence that heralds the apocalypse is not merely the lapsing of a subjective morality; it is the degeneration of the meaning behind the fundamental precepts of society. The journey of the protagonist, called to find reasons to save humanity, is an affirmation and renewal of these precepts, the equivalent of a profession of faith.

Korban (whose name is Hebrew for 'dedicated to God', prefiguring his messianic role) has been exploited and discarded by the society he served. He is a failure as a taxi driver because he finds the regulations pedantic and restrictive, and is fired as part of economic downsizing in Zorg's company. The yellow circles on his apartment walls, constant reminders of the police presence, warn him to 'Keep Clear'; he ruefully tells them "I'm trying", indicating not only the difficulty of avoiding the attention of the police, but

also that of remaining clear headed, clear sighted and maintaining a clear conscience in his tarnished society.

Korban's spiritual path, itself an allegorical retelling of Christ's triumph at Armageddon, is further linked to western cultural folklore with a reference to fairytale. In Korban's society, the masses concentrate their hope on a yearly contest, a lottery for a luxury holiday sponsored by the food product Gemini Croquettes. The brand name is a reference to the embodiment of conscience in the Disney version of the Pinocchio story (*Pinocchio*, Walt Disney, 1940), Jimini Cricket. This name is itself a slang derivative of Jesus Christ, which reinforces the implications for Korban's journey. Korban, then, occupies the position of Pinocchio; in one sense he can even be seen as a puppet, in that the naive idealism that inspired him to the service of his government was manipulated and exploited, resulting in the deaths of his entire company and his own abandonment. Like the wooden boy, he is led by his conscience through the difficulties of temptation so that his journey involves a discovery of dutiful responsibility, selfless love and virtue. The reward for this is his being reborn into a new, more fulfilling phase of life.

Jericho Cane's name similarly defines his position: in this case he is not dedicated to but distanced from God. Jericho was a city that barred its gates to Joshua, and so became subject to the *herem*, the curse of destruction<sup>6</sup>. His last name is a reference to Cain, son of Adam and Eve, who in jealousy killed his brother Abel. His initials are those of Christ, but at the outset he is in no position to fulfil that role. Jericho's grief over his family's death, and his perceived responsibility for it, estranges him from society. Like Korban, Jericho's conflict of responsibility between his job and his family caused his loss, seeing him protect strangers but not those closest to him. He sits in his apartment with a gun to his head, like Sharon in *The Rapture* and Abby in *The Seventh Sign*, tempted by death but without the courage to embrace it. He has a collection of pills which he mixes with alcohol to numb his emotions,

and exists in a kind of half-life, a deliberately chosen oblivion, enjoying nothing. The drugs represent a modern replacement for religious faith; both are systems for the emotional management of life's difficulties, and that Jericho has so many such systems, all obviously ineffectual, is a criticism of both the death of a culturally homogenous faith, and the cultural tendency to prescribe instant answers that only layer docility over despair. That the Pope is in a wheelchair signifies the decrepit state of the Church on earth, suggesting the impotence of the Fisher King, seen also in the character of Dan Truman in *Armageddon*. Jericho's journey is defined by the priest at St John's<sup>7</sup> church: "I'm sorry about your loss. Maybe its time to renew your faith". The renewal of Jericho's faith is a renewal of the spirit of his society, the location of the Christ within both. The context of the millennium is used to increase the sense of urgent decision, as it marks a cusp between old and new; the banners in New York demand, "NY2K: Where will you be?" For Jericho the choices are limited to Heaven or Hell.

The discovery of the Christ within comes via confrontation with the Antichrist. In *The 5th Element* Satan, the ultimate evil, is represented by the black planet, perhaps an inverted image of earth, a world consumed by the darkness of evil. Cornelius outlines its intent: "The goal of this thing is not to fight over money or power; it is to exterminate life, all forms of life", which is to say that its motives are inhuman; its evil is more than human; or rather humans are less evil because they generally require reasons to kill, however dubious. Yet the dark planet is intelligent, unlike the asteroids of *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact*, and thus it is the embodiment of paranoia - it *wants* to kill us for no reason. The dark planet's delegate on earth is one Jean Baptiste Emmannuel Zorg (Gary Oldman), head of a multinational corporation that owns Korban's taxi firm. His first names are an ironic reference to Christian virtue, John the Baptist and Emmannuel (meaning 'God has risen'), perhaps also linking him with the figure of the False Prophet. There are several

indications that Zorg is the Antichrist: his favourite weapon is a flame-thrower, and at Phloston paradise, the resort ship, he shoots Leeloo with a gun that reads '666'. Zorg has a rationalisation for his greed and power that parallels the nature of apocalypse itself: "Life, which you so nobly serve, comes from destruction, disorder and chaos". He thus admits that religion serves life, but emphasises its darker origins. Chaos represents the absence of God, as in the unformed world of Genesis 1. The juxtaposition suggests that the figure of Antichrist has a crucial role in spiritual life, providing obstacles and temptations that aid an appreciation of God's benevolence. He demonstrates with a drinking glass, which is "peaceful, serene, boring - but if it is destroyed - what a lovely ballet ensues, so full of form and colour." He describes the employment created by the broken glass, the benefits to the children of those employed to clean up the debris and replace the glass, "thus adding to the great chain of life. By creating a little destruction, I'm in fact encouraging life." In fact, in each of the apocalyptic films in this study (excepting perhaps *The Rapture*), the threat of death that is the apocalypse does encourage life. The old, corrupt order must go through a destruction in order to reveal the new, ensuring that life stays vital and identifying reasons to protect its continuance with energy and urgency.

Zorg, however, is corrupt in his justifications. He illegally sells weapons to warlike alien races, resulting in the destruction of more than drinking glasses. His service to the dark planet, known to him as Mr Shadow, leads him, Judas-like, to betray the messiah for money. Capitalist greed is the primary sin of *The 5th Element*, causing poverty and exploitation, and, like *End Of Days*, a huge gap between rich and poor. The decadent aristocracy at Phloston paradise is contrasted with the humble apartment of Korban Dallas and his disgust that the Gemini Croquettes contest, site of so much hope for the working class, has been rigged to facilitate his mission there. There is also a criticism of decadent capitalism in *End Of Days*; the devil, called only "The

Man” in the credits, possesses the body of a Wall street investment banker. This ties him into the same power structures as Zorg, signifying the Antichrist’s pursuit of earthly dominance, seen earlier with Ambassador Thorn in *The Omen*. There are several False Prophets around him; Christine encounters one on the subway, who tells her, incorrectly as it turns out, “He’s gonna fuck you Christine”, referring to Christine’s prophesied sex with the devil. Dr Abel, Christine’s psychiatrist, is another, diagnosing mental illness to keep Christine from guessing the truth. Manny, Jericho’s partner, is tortured into helping the devil, and becomes the third False Prophet when he betrays Jericho. The figure of the False Prophet is part of a complex network of truth and lies negotiated by Jericho, and serves to highlight the difficulty of identifying what is true. Like Baudrillard’s example of a psychosomatic illness that creates actual physical symptoms, indistinguishable from those of ‘real’ illness,<sup>8</sup> the False Prophet performs miracles and by his presence on earth genuinely heralds the end of the world, therefore manifesting the same characteristics as a real prophet. This creates immense difficulty for ‘true’ prophets, challenging the definition of real, blurring the boundaries. Yet the distinction is of utmost importance, and in Revelation awareness of it means the difference between damnation and salvation. This problem extends into the rest of the film, drawing a fine line between reality and illusion, such as the temptation offered to Jericho, the illusion of his family’s return, indistinguishable from the real and yet not true. The trial for Jericho is in the ability to know the difference, to appreciate the value of reality, however harsh, as opposed to the delusional comfort of lies.

The difference between truth and lies is the definitive difference between God and Satan. The manifestations of these are varied; the seven deadly sins represent manifestations of satanic falsehood in that they divert human attention towards things with no intrinsic spiritual value. The Antichrists of apocalyptic film can be categorised by the particular deadly sin

they manifest, which is at once a critique of the negative social impact of the sin and a popularly understood signifier of that character's evil. If Zorg's sin is thus Greed, as demonstrated by his rapacious multinational enterprises and callous disregard for the consequences of his weapon dealing, then the devil of *End Of Days* thrives on Lust. He is introduced with it, as his first act on possessing his human body is to lustfully kiss a woman, grasping her breast, in a busy, expensive restaurant. This act at once contravenes social decorum and mocks the supposed fidelity of the couple, as the woman is with another man. Sex is ultimately linked to destruction, as the Man leaves the restaurant and it explodes behind him. Sexual love is identified as antithetical to God's love, or pure human love. What it threatens, and thus what must be protected, is innocence: the wife and child Jericho failed to protect is represented in Christine, in danger of being corrupted by impure love. She eats an apple, symbol of Eve's temptation, and has a vision of it writhing with maggots which then become lost souls; sex is equated first with decay, then Hell. Christine is further likened to Eve before the Fall, when she casually disrobes for a shower, innocent to the sexual potential of her body; while thus undressed she is attacked by a group of priests from the Vatican who believe that killing her will avert the apocalypse. She is pinned to her bed by a priest, who, reading the last rites, prepares to stab her; it is a pseudo-rape scene, symbolised by the penetrating dagger, and the bath of blood in the next room in which her servant has died. When rescued by Jericho from this conflated murder and debauching she grabs a jacket before leaving the house, a fig leaf to cover her bodily shame. When she is later seduced by the Man her body becomes overtly sexualised, in a low-cut black dress, slit to the thigh.

While both Jericho and Korban occupy messianic positions, the fate of the apocalypse rests also on the fate of a woman. In *The 5th Element* it is Leeloo, the supreme being. The Mondochiwans, a benevolent alien race whose status as gods on earth grants them their own religion, bring Leeloo to



earth every five thousand years to combat the dark planet, the embodiment of evil that threatens the world. She is all but killed when the Mondochiwan ship is shot down; human technology is advanced enough to regenerate her body through DNA cloning. Leeloo, like Christ, is resurrected, but the sequence in which it happens demonstrates that patriarchal presumptions are still in place three hundred years in the future. In the opening sequence, the archaeologist had translated the hieroglyphics: “This man, this perfect being,” and the government officials who regenerate Leeloo also assume the supreme being is male. They refer to Leeloo as “Mr Perfect”, describe “his DNA chain” and declare that they “Can’t wait to meet him”. The exclamation by Cornelius, “He’s a she”, following Leeloo’s regeneration is a comment on the motif of the male messiah that has been present in most, if not all of the films in the study and is almost an echo of the reaction of an audience conditioned to expect male divinity. *The 5th Element* reflects back on this convention by allowing the presumption to build, even constructing the expectation, and then subverting it.

Yet despite this politically charged irony, the film does not constitute a progressive depiction of women. The reconstituted Leeloo is practically a newborn, representing idealised virginal womanhood. It is made explicit that although it is her job to be messiah, Korban will take credit for being the saviour. When given the mission to recover the elemental stones from the diva Pavalaguna, Major Monroe announces, “Major Dallas: you have been selected for a mission of the utmost importance: to save the world.” Leeloo is further diminished in status by her femaleness. She is called “mankind’s most precious possession”, indicating that despite her superior DNA and supernatural powers she is still a chattel. When Korban takes the unconscious Leeloo to Cornelius, the priest tells him “Weddings are one floor down.” This exchange enhances the nascent sexual tension between Leeloo and Korban but also makes it sinister, a barbaric marriage to an almost naked, unconscious

girl. Leeloo's unconsciousness reinforces her frailty; it is the first of several occasions she needs Korban's help, transferring to him any sense of her messianic power.

Other women in the film are dolls, with identical plastic hair and clothing. Those who deviate from this norm are either parodied or ignored: the single woman in the government headquarters wears the same uniform as her male counterparts; Major Iseborg, whose name indicates her frigidity and thus her unnaturalness as a woman, is unattractive because of her military unfemininity. Korban is afraid to so much as pretend to be her husband for the purposes of the mission. He is repelled by her size and butch appearance, finding his self-defined masculinity threatened by a woman displaying strength. Major Iseborg wears her hair in two buns on the sides of her head, reminiscent of Princess Leia in *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), and wears a similar costume; this may infer a critique of the strong feminist heroine, as Leia was a sexually autonomous, politically powerful and capable figure, ruler of her home planet and the leader of the Rebel Alliance. Her caricature in Major Iseborg suggests that this female strength is part of the cultural emasculation of men and defeminising of women challenged by the film; Leia's effigy is symbolically burned in Major Iseborg. Korban finds the petite, femme Leeloo much more appealing and, reinforcing his opinion of sexless, frigid Major Iseborg, shuts her in a freezer when Leeloo arrives. Other women in Korban's life are distant at best. His ex-wife is only seen in photographs; his mother is a disembodied, unsympathetic, guilt-inducing voice on the phone, like a projection of Korban's subconscious fears of inadequacy. If Jimini Cricket is Korban's guide, then his mother is the devil on the other shoulder.

*End Of Days* presents a similarly problematic depiction of women. Christine York is the central female figure, born at a prophesied time to be the future mother of the Antichrist. Her name deliberately parallels "Christ in

New York”, and it is mistakenly read as such from the words carved into Thomas Aquinas’s dead body, but like the female protagonists of *The Seventh Sign* and *The Rapture* she is not Christ. Christine is an innocent, raised by servants of Satan to be pure. She represents for Jericho the purity of his own dead family, and apart from them is the only example of a virtuous female in the film. She is a victim to her sinful desires, which in essence are for rape and impregnation by Satan, defining women as irrational slaves to dark lust. Others are symbolically defined as whores and witches: Christine’s psychiatrist (repeating the motif seen with Katherine Thorn in *The Omen* and Abby in *The Seventh Sign*, Christine is encouraged to believe her instincts and apocalyptic fear are a result of an inherently female hysteria), Dr Abel, has a wife and daughter who are incestuously seduced by Satan in Christine’s vision. The District Attorney is a severely dressed woman, apparently investigating the same crimes as Jericho with little sympathy for his interference, but she later reveals herself as an agent of Satan. This is a reiteration of social corruption, as positions of power and respect are shown to be controlled by antisocial interests, as well as a criticism of the defeminising of women with authority over men. In her rejection of the social nurturing her position could allow, she is an unnatural mother, embodiment of disfunction in a patriarchal state, and the model for the fairytale evil stepmother. Christine’s guardian is also an antimother grotesquely wearing the guise of care: she is a matronly woman who, disguised as a nurse, dedicates Christine to the Devil at birth, before she is washed.

The emphasis on conducting this ritual while the baby is still covered in her mother’s bodily fluids and thus unclean suggests that the woman’s body is inherently sinful, that what issues forth from the vagina is contaminated by its shame. In *End Of Days*, the body is the location of inherent human evil, and the woman’s body is its centre, an object of fear: its ability to reproduce is a reminder of male obsolescence and mortality, “organically hostile to all that is

old”<sup>9</sup>, and it represents base temptation away from male rationality, the mind and spirit. Christine is tortured by a Freudian terror of her own desire, which will betray her, helpless to resist, into sin.

*The 5th Element* also contains suggestions of this. In the opening sequence, the archaeologist at the Mondochiwan temple interprets its hieroglyphics: “When the three planets are in eclipse, a black hole like a door is opened. Evil comes, spreading terror and chaos...see the snake, Billy, the ultimate evil.” The three planets represent a trinity in darkness, like the unholy trinity, Satan, Antichrist and False Prophet, defined in *The Omen*. Chaos and darkness equate to an absence of God, who is ultimate order and manifest as divine light. The imagery of a phallic snake (linked to Satan through the serpent of evil and the dragon of Revelation) entering through a hole suggests either a violated feminised earth or a concept of the vagina as a gateway to evil. The woman herself does not need to be evil for her reproductive system to represent it; Christine’s innocence has been preserved in readiness for Satan.

This emphasis on the body can be seen as part of the carnivalesque inversion of order created by the impending apocalypse. The proximity of death enacts a blurring of boundaries between states of being, transgressions of frames of reference, such as the lines between natural and supernatural, “phenomenal and transcendent”<sup>10</sup> and the confines of the body. It is in this phase of existence that the protagonist (in this case male) undergoes his spiritual trial, as he is himself between definitions. As the state of the world reflected the protagonist’s despair at the outset, it follows him into his test, a constant mirror of his progress. He is stripped of previous rank and the conventions that have previously ruled him, and is tried on neutral ground. Bakhtin identifies the nature of the transgressive body that is a marker of the protagonist’s entry into the antistructural world:

Stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world...This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body.<sup>11</sup>

and further:

The material body principle is contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed. This is why all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, and immeasurable.<sup>12</sup>

The sense of an eternally growing populace underlies apocalyptic film as the social immortality that compensates individual death and thus must be preserved. It is exemplified in the extruding body, examples of which abound in both *End Of Days* and *The 5th Element*. Thomas Aquinas keeps his amputated tongue in a jar, and is later crucified on a hospital ceiling, bled dry by words cut into his skin; Dr Abel's wife and daughter are morphed together during sex with the devil, breaking down the sense of human individuality and perhaps suggesting that all amoral women are the same. The devil's black urine starts the car fire which claims the soul of Jericho's partner, Manny, and his stolen human body is dismembered by a subway train. Jericho suffers many wounds, which serve to link him to Christ: he receives stigmata wounds in his hands from hanging out his broken window, after throwing Satan out; he is severely beaten by homeless disciples of Hell, a parallel to the thirty nine lashes received by Christ before his crucifixion; he is then crucified himself, and receives medical aid from the priest of St John's Church; he is given several stitches in his brow, which resemble a stylised crown of thorns. Jericho receives the final of Christ's wounds at the end, falling on a sword, as Christ's side was pierced to prove his death on the cross.

*The 5th Element* similarly celebrates the open, transgressive body as an agent of redemption. The phallically named radio DJ Ruby Rhod is a bodily

Roi du Rire, a joyful phallus in a body stocking, waving his long cane/microphone in people's faces. He is a grotesque mixture of overt sexuality and effeminate posturing, a reflection of decadent masculinity, contrasted by the roughness of the powerful, unadorned body of Korban Dallas. He is African-American, and his eventual subservience to Korban enhances the dominance of the white male; Pfeil describes a tendency in action films to pair a white hero with a more effeminate black partner: "the black man seems to receive from the white man's hands...something very like virility itself."<sup>13</sup> Ruby Rhod is sexually promiscuous, but he is short on masculinity, and his encounter with Korban reflects the difference. His characterisation is reduced to a body part, which is either an ironic exaggeration of his phallic power, or a representation of the potency and fertility Korban's physicality restores to the world. Zorg's underling, also black, is similarly fragmented and summed up, listed only in the credits as Right Arm (Tricky). The diva Pavalaguna is the image of a fertility goddess combining thick phallic tentacles with an open, penetrable body. Korban, exercising his masculine prerogative, opens her stomach, probing to find the four stones concealed among her internal slime. Leeloo's body suffers the most extensive damage during the course of the film. She is blown to bits before reaching earth, and is pieced together like a jigsaw puzzle by the DNA cloner, exposing her skeleton, organs and muscles. Later she is shot while hiding in a ventilation shaft; like the rape of Christine by the Vatican Knights, it is a disempowering and a conquest, a reminder of her vulnerable female body and its need for a male protector. She is penetrated by bullets, as she herself has penetrated the viscera of the building, and she will be penetrated again by her male saviour when their relationship becomes sexual at the end of the film.

Thus the liminal, transitional stage of the journey is marked by an inversion of normal order, a blurring of the boundaries of life and death, class

and rank, sexual practice, physical power and the limits of the body. The world becomes undefined in a reflection of the protagonist's passage between states of being. The outcome for the world depends on the resolution of the protagonist's spiritual journey, which in effect, is a choice between good and evil; the former resulting in eternal life, the latter in death. More specifically, virtue is embodied in the selfless choice of society over the self. Korban, exploited by his society, initially refuses the mission to Phlostion, and only takes it when he realises that Leeloo is going there. A reluctant hero, he is selfish in his motives, and is only redeemed when to save the world he must explain human goodness to Leeloo. For Korban to define this even for himself is difficult; he seizes upon Leeloo's suggestion that 'Love' is worth saving. Unfortunately, Leeloo has trouble reconciling her functions as supreme being: "I was built to serve, not to love" and without love for the people she serves, she cannot do it selflessly. Korban's salvation, and thus the salvation of the world, is in the discovery and acknowledgement of this love. He must overcome his cynical defences and the fears of rejection caused by his first wife's abandonment to declare his love for Leeloo, a love that is a testament to the innate goodness of humanity, an affiliation to society, and a selfless sacrifice that redeems the world from corruption and despair.

Jericho Cane begins his spiritual journey in absolute despair, and it takes him toward absolute faith. He is an unlikely saviour; Satan tells him there is enough rage in his heart to join the forces of darkness. The priest at St John's advises Jericho of his unfitness to confront the devil: "It takes a person of pure heart to conquer pure evil", a sentiment also expressed in *The 5th Element*, when Cornelius says of the black planet, "shooting it will only make it stronger". Just as it is ultimately love that destroys the dark planet, Jericho must find the Christ in himself before he can defeat the antithesis. Jericho has a final epiphany in the church: gazing at the stained glass windows and iconography, he puts down the gun, a Glock, which he earlier said he trusted

more than God: "I have faith in my Glock." There is a suggestion that God speaks to him at this point; Jericho attests to his renewed faith by praying "Please God, help me. Give me strength." Satan arrives as a spirit, and causes an earthquake that shatters the Christian images, breaking the windows, and sending statues of angels to the floor in shards. However, the devil, who has previously tempted Jericho with the illusory return of his family, an overly idyllic picture of the American nuclear family, still places his emphasis on reflections and shadows. Just as Jericho rejected the mirage of his family, understanding the importance of the real, he is aware that the destruction of the Church's icons does not constitute a victory over God. When he is possessed by Satan, he finds a greater strength within that enables him to resist the devil's wishes long enough to throw himself on the Archangel Michael's sword. Christine kneels by his side, and their arrangement suggests a pietas, a reflection of the thirteenth station of the cross. This self-sacrifice, which links Jericho inexorably to Christ, is made to protect the sexual innocence of Christine; by association, the world is saved, freed from Satanic influence and reborn into a new millennium. Jericho receives the most orthodox reward of any protagonist: the promise of an eternal, utopic life, restored to his family, after his death.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kermode, F. in Bull, M. (ed.) *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc 1995 p. 252-3

<sup>2</sup> Pfeil, F. *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference*. London: Verso 1995 p.2

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas is named for the theologian and saint; the film suggests that it is the same Thomas, not yet dead. It is indicated by the Man (the devil) that they have known each other as adversaries for a thousand years. It is perhaps fitting that as a proponent of



the concept of Limbo he should remain thus on earth.

<sup>4</sup> Pfeil, 1995:25 (emphasis in original.)

<sup>5</sup> Pfeil, 1995:7

<sup>6</sup> Joshua, Chapters 2-6. The herem was “a regulation of the ‘holy war’ of ancient Israel, by which all captives and booty were destroyed in acknowledgement that all victory is won by Yahweh” (Darton, Longman and Todd, *The New Jerusalem Bible* (Theological Glossary), London: Doubleday and Company Inc. 1990 p.1442)

<sup>7</sup> A reference to the writer of Revelation, St John

<sup>8</sup> For a full discussion, see Baudrillard, J. (trans. Glaser, S.) *Simulacra and Simulation*. Michigan: Michigan University Press 1994

<sup>9</sup> Bakhtin, M. (trans. Iswolsky, H.) *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984 p. 242

<sup>10</sup> Bromley, D. *Constructing Apocalypticism*. in Robbins, T. and Palmer, S. (eds.) *Millennium, Messiahs and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, New York: Routledge 1997 p. 36

<sup>11</sup> Bakhtin, 1984:26

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p.19

<sup>13</sup> Pfeil 1995:16

## CONCLUSION

The call [to adventure] rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration - a rite, or a moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth.<sup>1</sup>

The apocalyptic process constitutes the symbolic death of social decay and the rebirth of a cleansed world. It is a wish-fulfilment fantasy of unity, of an end to dissonance and iniquity, achieved symbolically through a hero's reconciliation with his/her estranged society. The apocalyptic film represents a reiteration of social communitas, inspiring not the pity and fear of tragedy, but idealistic hope, acquiescence and agreement. Joseph Campbell, in his discussion of myth, describes the journey of a hero as being a quest for a sacred boon, and goes on to say that "the boon is a symbol of life."<sup>2</sup> The function of myth is to renew life through its symbolic loss and return; apocalyptic films operate as myths, in that life is sought and regiven to society through the hero's personal journey. The life regained by the ritual process of the protagonist is encapsulated in the moral precepts of the journey. The protagonists (re)discovery of faith in the founding principles of society vindicates and regenerates the community, renewing its relevance and vitality. In terms of what social elements are worth saving, the imagined worlds are made spaces for the interrogation of culture, investigating the nature of reality.

One of the chief agents of this ideological communication is the figure of the protagonist. The protagonist is the representative of the audience, the object of psychological identification, and thus the audience is encouraged to vicariously share his/her journey through life and death. Consequently, if invested in the protagonist's journey the audience can develop an empathy for the protagonist's values and attitudes. The characterisation of the protagonist

is part of the creation of meaning. John Fiske, describing Louis Althusser's theory of *hailing* and *interpellation* states that:

Hailing is the process by which language identifies and constructs a social position for the addressee. Interpellation is the larger process whereby language constructs social relations for both parties in an act of communication and thus locates them in the broader map of social relations in general.<sup>3</sup>

Films hail their audiences by means of symbolic characteristics in terms of subject and character. That is, an action film starring Bruce Willis predominantly hails a white, working class male audience, because Willis, through his film roles has become iconic as the quintessential white, working class male, and thus can elicit engagement in this audience. Similarly, Abby in *The Seventh Sign* hails middle class white homemakers and mothers. The figure of the protagonist is indicative of both the intended audience and contemporary cultural assessments of race, class and gender. This is best recognised over time, as contrasting attitudes between films act as an archive of cultural values. For example, the social distance between wealthy, ambitious Ambassador Thorn in *The Omen* and humble priest-turned-cop Thomas in *The Prophecy* indicates a temporal change in the prerequisites of affluence and class for a suitable hero. Changes in social perceptions of heroic values can be perceived even within the roles an iconic actor plays: Arnold Schwarzenegger in the action film *Commando* (Mark Lester, 1985) is an ex-army yuppie, comfortably and youthfully retired on an idyllic country estate. Fifteen years later in *End Of Days* he plays a brawny ex-policeman, essentially the same retired-serviceman character, but in despair; a clinically depressed, drunk widower in his forties, in a family home turned by his grief into a bleak hovel. The social climate of the mid-eighties, coinciding with a boom in capitalist culture, symbolised success with wealth; its heroes, to signify their phallic power and worth, manifested the consumerist trappings of

this success. A backlash against this culture inverted the heroic structure: the late nineties vilifies the selfishness and iniquity at the heart of yuppie culture, making the devil a Wall street banker in *End of Days*, and the hero a psychologically broken working class struggler, the champion of the proletariat. Schwarzenegger is a superhuman prole, however; as Fred Pfeil states, he is “an image of the new/old white working man [who] registers by now with us as *both* Barbarian (the *Conan* films of 1982 and 1984) and Cyborg (*The Terminator* 1984).<sup>4</sup> In *End Of Days* Schwarzenegger adds another dimension to the working man’s dreams of destiny: that of saint.

The apocalyptic film, working as it does within the framework of a messianic myth, brings about the apotheosis of its successful protagonists. This is essentially the result of the protagonist’s successful reincorporation with society, becoming aligned with its spiritual bases and hence with its God. It is significant therefore to examine who, in a genre that deifies its subjects, fails their test. Ambassador Thorn does not avert the apocalypse; however, the unvanquished demon is partly a convention of horror, and Thorn’s spiritual trial is not necessarily failed. The only other figure who fails to stop the apocalypse is Sharon in *The Rapture*. While Sharon does not want to stop the apocalypse, being the only protagonist who is actually desirous of it, she is also the only protagonist with absolutely no power over its eventuating. Sharon’s rejection of the patriarchal God and his conditional salvation is perhaps a recognition that power over the apocalypse is gained through a compromise, a surrendering of the self to a dominant power: for all the protagonists, male or female, success in the trial relies on subjection to society, however it is represented in each film. For Sharon, the price is too high. For women in apocalyptic film in general the price of power equates to a debasing by male dominance; Leeloo in *The 5th Element* is strong at first, but made powerless until she submits to Korban’s desire for her. Abby in *The Seventh Sign* has acquiescence demanded of her, both in terms of her social

role in a human patriarchy and in her relationship to a male God, and to retain some semblance of her power of choice she submits even to death. These women are at least protagonists, however, or something close to; in apocalyptic film, as in many other genres, women are secondary characters, facilitating the male protagonist's journey through their embodiment of social values. Female characters frequently exist to symbolise aspects of the society the protagonist is estranged to: Grace in *Armageddon* and Char in *The Arrival* represent domesticity and home, what the hero comes home to when the liminal playtime has been exhausted; conversely ruthless career women Connie in *Independence Day* and *Deep Impact*'s Jenny indicate the disfunction of home, the social corruption to be purged by the successful protagonists. Women often symbolise the purity of the innocent, helpless victim, drawing the male subject into the liminal, such as Christine in *End Of Days*, Mary in *The Prophecy* and Katherine Thorn in *The Omen*. They are witnesses and foils, verifying and providing contrast to male power; they are wombs for Christ and Antichrist alike, the body that creates but also facilitates apocalypse, "the bodily grave of man."<sup>5</sup> These depictions of women potentially contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchy in contemporary society. The expectation of a male hero constructed by generic conventions excludes women from the myth of heroic destiny. The post-feminist Leeloo is an essay in attractive capitulation, tempering her strength so that the heroic role of the male should not be undermined; she could have averted the apocalypse without Korban Dallas if she had stayed within the official government sphere, but instead she forms a submissive association with him that exalts the working class male to deity, superior to even the supreme being. This is particularly significant in light of the attention given to criticising the assumption that the messiah would be male; in effect, the sexism is vilified in word but indulged in action. The paradigm of the female/feminist Christ thus simultaneously created and subverted is stripped of social power, a lowering

of women that is part and parcel of the cartoon male fantasy that is *The 5th Element*.

The depiction of women in apocalyptic films is thus problematic at best, an edgy negotiation with a male dominated world. This world is also largely white. The only African-American protagonist in this study is *Independence Day*'s Steven Hiller, and he shares that place with three others, all white. This indicates the relative visibility of African-Americans in the popular media. For each white male protagonist, there is a lesser, non-white counterpart: Korban is flanked by the effeminate Ruby Rhod; Jericho Cane's partner, Manny, is Latino, and in contrast to Jericho submits to the torture of the devil. Manny, as the betraying Judas, is redeemed by Jericho, the white Christ: the devil commands him to shoot Jericho, on pain of immolation, but Jericho's forgiveness and trust in Manny's residual virtue convinces Manny to choose a martyr's death over the murder of a friend.

There are no prominent non-white characters in *The Seventh Sign*, or *The Omen*, possibly because both are set in middle- to upper class worlds, the economics of both excluding other races, typically associated with poverty, or at least vulgarity of class. In *The Arrival*, deviation from the Anglo-Saxon norm equates to the evil of the Other. The disguised aliens are predominantly Mexican, perhaps in reference to their origin beyond the borders of American society; this serves to universalise America, as non-Americans are linked to the strange, interplanetary invaders. The only African-American in the film is Kiki, the young boy who moves next door to protagonist Zane Zeminsky. Both Kiki's race and professed origin, the corrupt and violent San Francisco, serve to locate him within the liminal sphere, a supernatural guide for Zane who incorporates all the aspects of Otherness. Zane's suburban neighbourhood is made idyllic in comparison to both Kiki's stories of San Francisco and Zane's experience of the dangerous squalor of Mexico, normalising his professional lifestyle and linking it to virtue and American

superiority; by contrast, Kiki's eventual betrayal and return to his grotesque alien body makes both his race and origin unnatural, part of the threat to utopic America. However, the alien presents a moral lesson for complacent white society: that the gradual decadence signified in the approaching eco-apocalypse will be its downfall, and the current order will be replaced. Otherness is not necessarily vilified, but difference is equated to a threat to dominance.

Similarly to *Independence Day*, in *Deep Impact* there is only one non-white in a prominent role, the president of the United States. President Beck is the African-American leader of a white Christian world. As he is one of the only non-whites in the film (the other is astronaut Mark Simon) and is not one of the three protagonists, it is possible that his presidency is intended to signify part of the corruption of the official sphere, the decadence to be purged by the apocalypse. However, he survives the apocalypse and has the last triumphant speech, locating him firmly within the positive value structure. He is also the primary link to Christianity, being the most vocal proponent of it; he symbolises the social unity that is the justification for American cultural dominance in the film, indicating that there is no racial prejudice or issues of class threatening the omnipotent benevolence of America. This reading is supported by Mark Simon's pre-death redemption and return to Christianity, an alignment with America's social and spiritual supremacy.

Apocalyptic films are thus a location for ideological communication, contributing to popular impressions of social difference. The religious foundation of the apocalyptic myth serves to underscore the validity of the films' cultural observations, constructing an aura of truth around representations of heroism and villainy. Like the golden age of the Old West, which, through its glorification of the white settler in popular media has become the founding myth of American culture, the popular religious apocalyptic film possibly looks back in nostalgia to a time when widespread

fundamentalism provided moral surety, and ascribed a structure and meaning to otherwise random events. The films relocate Christianity at the base of social organisation, ascribing spiritual unity to American culture. Robert Torrance states that: "Religion protects man against the terror of "anomy," or meaninglessness, by audaciously attempting to conceive of the entire cosmos as humanly significant."<sup>6</sup> The meaning sought by apocalyptic film is not only in terms of general social principles, such as morality, class or gender, but also a discourse on death. The apocalypse threatens society with death, and within that, examines the process on the edge of a protagonist's personal death. The carnivalesque liminal journey of a protagonist is an exploration of boundaries, crossing the limits of body, the social and mortality in order to interrogate the nature of life and death. What is discovered in apocalyptic film is that death can be elided via the spiritual journey. The spiritual quest is a search for transcendence, an attempt to get beyond the self and the limits of mortality. The evasion of apocalypse equates to a transcendence of death, suggesting that humans are spiritually greater than the physical conditions that restrict them. Association with society bestows the reward of being part of something greater, something that does not die; society thus becomes synonymous with religion in terms of the object of transcendence of the human/mortal state. Membership to society and religion alike is a transcendence of the limits of self, as the individual becomes a part of a greater whole, larger than the sum of its parts; through this affiliation, the individual transcends personal mortality through associative connection to the immortal community. In this sense, the metaphor of apocalypse stands for individual death, the punishment for ideological distance from society, the Hell of living and dying alone, devoid of context and ascribed meaning. It is avoided via active unity with society, alignment with its moral precepts and the selfless defence of its autonomy.

The liminal area exists as a demonstration of the chaotic wilderness beyond social convention. This space is characterised by deviance and



marginality, and in one sense it can be seen as an indulgent liberation from the confines of order. The carnival nature of the liminal, in its energy and joyful transgressions, can be seen as a challenge to normal life, even a subversion of the moral rectitude of the films' resolutions. Victor Turner states that liminal stages by definition are "the types of socio-cultural processes and settings in which new symbols...tend to be generated,"<sup>7</sup> that is, they are the birthplace of original thought, creativity and social reform. The liminal is a space to explore social conflicts and change; it is vicarious playtime. Brian Sutton-Smith states:

The normative social structure represents the working equilibrium, the 'anti-structure' represents the latent system of potential alternatives from which novelty will arise when contingencies in the normative system require it. We might more correctly call this second system the proto-structural system, because it is the precursor of innovative normative forms. It is the source of new culture.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of an interrogation of culture and its forms, the ritual journeys of apocalyptic protagonists are mythic explorations of social issues; the representation of the journey is as important as the conclusion, as its transgressions denote a freedom of inquiry not present in the normal social order. Because of the politically conservative nature of genre film, which seeks out a popular audience and maintains it by fulfilling expectations of structure and reaffirming the dominant ideology, the liminal is constructed as a dark and dangerous place, the representation of the evil transcended by a successful protagonist. However, it also constitutes a condoned indulgence in that darkness, such as the violent action sequences of *The 5th Element* and *End Of Days*, and the cowboy dominance of alien landscapes in *Armageddon*. Turner states that "these new symbols and constructions...feed back into the 'central' economic and politico-legal domains and arenas, supplying them with goals, aspirations, incentives, structural models and raisons d'être"<sup>9</sup> which is

to say that the vicarious liminal process created by apocalyptic film can itself be seen as part of a social process of regeneration, challenging the known order with images of the rich and strange unknown. Torrance agrees with Turner as to the formative nature of the journey, but ascribes it more to the individual than the liminal: "The transformative agency in religion is...the dissident individual who gives new voice to his society's deepest, if nearly forgotten, aspirations."<sup>10</sup> The dream of messianic destiny exhibited in the male centred apocalyptic films constitutes this process, as does Sharon's feminist protest in *The Rapture*. The representations of Christian motifs contributes to a new popular spiritual vocabulary, in which angels are evil and devils wear Armani suits, and in which visions of God are obscured by humanity's blinding brilliance.

The apocalypse is metaphorical for social crisis and so its avoidance is a ritualised demonstration of triumph over the represented problem. *Armageddon* and *Deep Impact* confront humanity's precariousness in the physical universe and the parallel social instability of family breakdown. Society is symbolically healed through the consecration of a white, heterosexual, patriarchal, American-dominated vision of 'home' discovered by the protagonist. *Independence Day* and *The Arrival* similarly prescribe cultural dominance as a defence against the threat of an invading Other, and idealise family as a solution for degenerate society; however here the apocalypse represents human self destruction, the prodigal tragedy of environmental disaster. Humanity, in a sense, becomes its own Antichrist, exhibiting both sloth and greed in the face of impending death.

The Christian centred apocalyptic film treats a spiritual crisis. What is threatened is the loss of a relationship with the transcendent, casting society adrift on the waves of passive atheism. This affects society in terms of its justification for morality and laws, which are based on religious precepts, and also leads to a cynical nihilism in its members. The spiritually bereft

protagonist is thus shown to be in despair, and begins a progression back to faith which legitimates social control and reinstates traditional conceptions of the community as a spiritual whole. Within this model, the apocalypse for the female protagonist stands for a crisis in role for women. God, as the head of the dominant male order, is characterised as an absent yet demonic figure, implementing oppressive rules and visiting punishment on women. The female protagonist at first attempts to conform, then, finding there is no way to appease the monster God, either protests or crumbles in the impasse. The process is a metaphor for the feminist confrontation of patriarchy; the failure of the films to reach a resolution other than death or exile for their protagonists signifies the difficulty of satisfactory closure on this issue. Satisfactory, that is, for the feminist position. *The 5th Element* and *End of Days* treat ostensibly the same crisis from the opposite viewpoint. In these films the apocalypse represents a crisis for the male role in a post-feminist society; the protagonists, men emasculated by low social rank and the difficulty of self-definition in relation to female equality, undergo the journey to reinstate dominant manhood. This is achieved by the submission of a woman, a damsel in distress whose dilemma reestablishes the need for a white (Anglo-Saxon) knight; the predestined selection of the everyman hero, plucked from despair to be thrust into the role of messiah, celebrates phallic power and restores latent mythic virility.

The apocalypse thus stands for a threat to social stability; the process of threatening and saving the world is a ritualised demonstration of human agency over the forces of fate, a defiant gesture towards the unknown, the fear of oblivion and insignificance in the (spiritual) universe. The individual's experiences in the pre-apocalyptic world are essentially a paradigm for human confrontation of death. The apocalypse is established as the ogre of a fairytale, the consequence of moral laxness and failure to conform to society. The ogre is demolished by the deified human, whose virtue redeems humanity

and vindicates the social order threatened by the cataclysmic end; thus the eschatological scenario exists only to be conquered, and society is regiven autonomy over all things, including death. Films such as *Planet of the Apes* which took as their premise the development of human technological ability to the point where humans could bring about their own apocalypse, a precept that also assumes that humans *would*, have been contextualised by the messianic human who, far from destroying society, uses the same technology in defence of life. Human history is celebrated and made sovereign by the modern apocalyptic film, equating to a sense of utopic social achievement and the triumphant, eternal conquest of death.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Campbell, J. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New York: Pantheon Books Inc. 1949 p. 51
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid. p.189
- <sup>3</sup> Fiske, J. in Allen, R. (ed.) *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled: Television and Contemporary Criticism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1992
- <sup>4</sup> Pfeil, F. *White Guys: Studies in Postmodern Domination and Difference*. London: Verso 1995 p. 30-31 (emphasis in original)
- <sup>5</sup> Bakhtin, M. (trans. Iswolsky, H.) *Rabelais and His World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1984 p.240
- <sup>6</sup> Torrance, R. *The Spiritual Quest: Transcendence in Myth, Religion and Science*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1994 p. 14 -15
- <sup>7</sup> Turner, V. *From Ritual to Theatre*. New York: PAJ Publications 1992 p.28
- <sup>8</sup> Sutton-Smith, B. quoted in Turner, 1992:28
- <sup>9</sup> Turner, 1992:28
- <sup>10</sup> Torrance, 1994:13

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